



Humanum

ISSUES IN FAMILY, CULTURE & SCIENCE

SPRING 2012

Children of Divorce





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SPRING 2012—CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

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Recovering Origins

STRATFORD CALDECOTT

An issue of Humanum dedicated to the theme of Children of Divorce (named for the landmark [April 2012 conference](#) of the Center for Cultural and Pastoral Research, "Adult Children of Divorce") must inevitably raise the question, not only of how divorce affects children and their development, but of the nature of marriage itself.

With this issue we begin a sequence of four on the general topic of "RECOVERING ORIGINS", so the frame within which we are considering the nature and breakdown of marriage is one of anamnesis, of remembering - remembering our own origins, and in this light the origin of marriage; for unless we remember where we are coming from, we can easily lose all sense of identity and of purpose.

It was the discovery of a book by Elizabeth Marquardt on divorce that gave rise to the very idea of the Center for Cultural and Pastoral Research. In that book, the author, as a child of divorce herself, freeing herself from the long-standing censorship of any criticism of the free choices of consenting adults, took on the "settled doctrine" that a "good divorce" was better than a bad marriage. It was, in fact, from within her experience of such a divorce that she was able to see what was essentially bad about divorce (however well her parents conformed to the norms of a "good" one). It was not that her parents fought (hers did not, not, at least, in front of her), nor that she could not see both her parents (she could, and equally, according to the new arrangement), nor that she suffered terribly from the deficit in "social capital" (that was managed well to the point that she was successful in school, went to a good university, and, of course, eventually wrote a book). The problem was the deep malaise about her lack of place, a place to stand on. The title of her book would say it all: *Between Two Worlds*. She had been put into the world by two worlds coming together. But now that those two worlds were no longer together, she was "left hanging," so to speak between them with no terra firma to stand upon.

Of course, in speaking of the damage that is caused by divorce, we need to tread carefully. Humanum is a work of reason as well as faith, and that means we cannot presume to deduce the precise outcome of any divorce a priori. Nor can we forget that we live in a society where divorce and remarriage, not to mention living together outside marriage, is increasingly the norm. People often enter marriage expecting to

be able to divorce - which, of course, from the point of view of the Catholic Church means that their marriage is invalid in the first place. Many of us will know families in which divorce seems to have had no ill-effects at all. The situation is therefore complex. And yet, as Marquardt argues and as the books and studies under review in the present issue reveal, the damage caused by even the gentlest and most polite of divorces may be subtle and long-lasting, since from the child's point of view a unitary "origin" in the love of this man and this woman has been broken, with untold consequences for the child's sense of identity. The divorce inflicts what Andrew Root in *The Children of Divorce* calls a wound that is more than merely psychological - an "ontological wound." [See the testimony from [Nicky Rowdon](#) filed under "And more..."]

It was Marquardt's witness "from the trenches," if you will, that suggested a compelling way of engaging our "anthropology" - the "anthropology of love" that we have inherited from John Paul II. It would be the child who would give witness to this anthropology, a witness to what is and isn't negotiable, as it is subjected to the many social experiments of our time. Our focus on the child is not, then, our way of avoiding the question about the truth of the human person, the truth of love, and the truth of marriage as we place ourselves strategically in the public square. On the contrary, it is a way of focusing these questions with a confidence that these are the questions shared by everyone in that square. A child who, in the company of thousands of others, refuses to accept that "it doesn't matter if her parents are together or not" says something both about what it means to be a human being, what it means to love, and to be married, since the child is the fruit of it. "By your fruits...."

It still may seem, however, that, now especially, as we are embroiled in questions about whether or not marriage only concerns two people of the opposite sex, that the question about the indissolubility of that same institution has more or less been settled, if not for any other reason than that it is a *fait accompli* and has been for several decades. But sometimes it is the unsettling of old "settled" questions that is needed to address adequately the new questions we are facing. Apart from the questions this begs about the inevitability of "progress" and the refusal to hold this "progress" to any standard, we don't think then that the emergence of new literature written by now adult children of divorce pointing to its most basic problem is insignificant for these new questions, as it puts into focus the inalienable link between marriage and the child (in both directions!).

Return to the Origin

As Christians we must not lose sight of the ideal, or cease trying to understand what

marriage in its essence really means. When Jesus was asked about divorce, he sent his listeners back to the origins of marriage, back to the beginning:

Some Pharisees approached him, and to test him they said, "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?" He answered, "Have you not read that the creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother, and cling to his wife, and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?" "It was because you were so unteachable," he said, "that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: the man who divorces his wife - I am not speaking of fornication - and marries another, is guilty of adultery." The disciples said to him, "If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is not advisable to marry." But he replied, "It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born that way from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can" (Matt 19: 3-12, JB).

"It was not like this from the beginning." Jesus refers explicitly to Genesis 2: 24: "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body." It is because woman was made from man, and made into a living soul like him, a "helpmate" for him, according to Genesis. Reading this in the light of the theology of the body explained by Blessed John Paul II, we may say that the "original solitude" of man as a central image of God within the creation - as a physical body, that is, alive by virtue of a spiritual soul that comes directly from God and is made for him alone - opens up into the "original unity" of man with woman - as a male or female body, that is, apt for a physical union within which new life can be created. It is this original unity that makes man (male and female) an image not just of God per se but of his Trinitarian vitality, always transcending duality in unity and superabundance.

Marriage in the sacramental sense - rather than in the legal sense of a contract between two people, which can always be dissolved - only exists because of this intrinsic or constitutive relationship to God, the basis of an ontological bonding of the two persons into a new "body" that can be exclusively identified with neither of them. The sacramental union we are describing can exist only until death, but up to that

point, no matter how distant the couple may become from each other, it continues to subsist, and to affect the destiny of each - just as, analogously, two subatomic particles once "entangled" are always linked across time and space, and the fate of one is bound to the fate of the other. The nuptial union in question is not simply a physical pairing for the purpose of intercourse and reproduction (in which two human bodies become a single point of "origin" for the new life of a child), but a persisting unity of two lives in one story, one overarching drama.

If marriage is this, it may be a school for sanctity, but it need not be an oasis of happiness or ease. It is a process, a crucible, a factory in which something is being done to each of the spouses, such that they cannot emerge unaffected. The easy acceptance of divorce in our society seems to prevent many people experiencing that struggle and its eventual fruits, which their parents' or grandparents' generation often did - the joy and love that comes from persistence, the forgiveness of faults, and the determination to remain faithful to the most solemn of all promises.

G.K. Chesterton was stunned by the ease with which marriages in America could be dissolved in law. "If Americans can be divorced for 'incompatibility of temper,' I cannot conceive why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible." He was overstating for rhetorical effect, but it is the case that man and woman are profoundly different, and the unity of marriage is a unity that depends on this difference, not the kind of unity in which one person absorbs and dissolves the other. To quote the review of Andrew Root's book by Juliana Weber, our problem is that "the Enlightenment's overemphasis on the individual shifts the objective of marriage from that of shared property, shared power, shared labor and the like, to one of individual and subjective fulfillment" - so that marriage depends on the unreliable affection of two individuals pulled in many different directions.

Indissolubility is grounded in sacramentality. Marriage is a living symbol of, and derives its reality from, the union of Christ with his Church, the union of human and divine nature in Christ, and (supremely) the union of Persons in the Trinity. It is the Trinity and Incarnation that make marriage a sacrament, creating the possibility of a bond that transcends all earthly whims and feelings because it is rooted in eternity and in the graces poured out on the Cross. We are not, in the end, our parents' children, simply. The very indissolubility they are held to, is a token of the Eternity of which they are only images, and a child that loses his or her ontological "home" through the effects of divorce can find it again in the Church (as Andrew Root also

suggests). The very reason that consequences of divorce on children are serious (since they obscure the Eternal Love of God) is also the very reason they are not ultimately tragic (because our parents are only an image of a deeper Origin, which is now present to us in the Church).

Margaret McCarthy and Stratford Caldecott

March 1, 2012

Cold War

NICKY ROWDON

Notes Towards a Phenomenology of Hope

Some time in the 1960s, I remember watching a television documentary on nuclear weapons and the public health consequences in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The creation of a weapon of unprecedented power, by deconstructing one of the building blocks of life, and the long-term effects of that weapon on another such building block, the human gene, became the subject of an enduring fascination. Now I realize that I was intuitively homing in on something which served as a cipher for my own life, as a child of divorce. A divorce which split the atom of my existence straight down the middle, leaving me to cope with a lifetime of emotional fall-out.

This is not the place to rehearse the details of my parents' marriage and its collapse. Nor indeed of all the ramifications those things entailed for me, their only child. Suffice it to say that two damaged individuals, each with a history of dysfunction and tragedy in their own upbringing, came together for the wrong reasons, had a child, and then parted. It is a common story. What was perhaps not so common was the vehemence with which they fought each other through the divorce courts, with me as the pawn in their power-struggle. This occurred during the years when I was between three and seven years of age. I who, in their love letters (which I only recently read), they had called "our little angel" was now referred to - in the correspondence of their lawyers - as "the child." Later on I became "that bloody child" (my mother, at her worst) or "that poor confused child" (my father and stepmother, also not at their best). I dwell on these epithets only because they epitomized the state of being, the fractured ontology, with which I would have to struggle thereafter.

Once the ground zero of divorce and custody battle was concluded, the real war began. It was a cold war: a dirty war, a propaganda war, entailing guilt, espionage, betrayal, and constant drip-by-drip attrition. Neither parent could speak well of the other. It was a given that anything which pleased one parent, automatically displeased the other. And so they spoke ill of me, too, of course, when the unconscious desire took them to hurt the other and blacken their character, naturally enough projected onto the child who carried qualities of both. Much has been written about the crisis of identity that a child of divorce experiences, the lack of a secure ground on which to

stand. When I think about the overriding atmosphere of my early life, it was one of fear and mistrust. Of constant tension. Of never being able to relax, lest a new threat, a new aggression against the core of my being, appear in the corner of my eye.

Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote that a child receives its first experience of God through its mother's smile. This is far from being a sentimental observation. The smile of the mother conveys and confers an existential security: the sense that another being, indeed the being on which you depend for sustenance and safety, takes delight in your mere existence. If that smile is missing, you seek it elsewhere. Of course, no human being can give you an enduring smile. It is one of the myriad consequences of the Fall that we are more concerned with knowledge than with love. This applies both to carnal knowledge and psychological knowledge, which in our time is held to be a source of power in the personal sphere, similar to the power of economic theory in the public sphere. But eventually, knowledge that is not grounded in the divine contains the seeds of its own destruction. Usury may lead to a sub-prime catastrophe. Existential imposition - the objectification of another human being - invariably results in the collapse of trust. Because we are not God. We are petty Olympians with delusions of grandeur, trying to manipulate events and failing.

It has been noted that the children of divorce frequently have problems relating to a God who is grounded in an ecclesial community, and a Church that exercises authority. We are held to be incapable of accepting authority. This is only logical, given our formative experiences. And yet God's logic transcends human logic (or "worldly wisdom," as the Gospels have it). While children whose family background is relatively secure may experience a primary relationship with God as Father, my own first relationship with God was through the Son. As a young child, after nightmares about the darkness engulfing me, I would dream that a tiny, tiny white man was placed on my tongue. Then the fear would subside. I would be safe.

Looking back, I know that I was drawn to Christ as the presence of a love which healed and nurtured, by giving itself to me in the most personal and intimate way possible. It was inevitable that I would become a Catholic, and it was a deep-seated recognition of the Eucharistic Christ that drew me into the Church, and eventually into the Trinitarian experience which is both fruitful marriage and the life of faith.

Yet my first and primary experience of the divine smile had to be grounded in the divine tears. I met God in his most reduced, self-effacing moment: in his defeat and death. Only there could he harrow the hell in which I felt myself to be trapped and, seizing me by the wrist as in the icon of the Resurrection in the Hagia Sophia, draw me

out to the light. He had hung next to me while I was on my own uncomprehending cross, and he had told me that today I would be with him in paradise, simply because I had named him for who he is. Named him by uttering my sinner's cry for mercy. No wonder I would later develop a devotion to the Polish Pope whose pontificate was infused by an endless meditation on divine mercy in the face of all the sufferings in our godless century.

When I came to have children of my own, I had only one thing to ask of God. That the terrible legacy of my parents and their parents, the sins of my poor fathers and mothers, should end with me. That none of it should be visited upon my children. This is how we make sense of our own sufferings: through his Passion and Resurrection Christ gives them meaning and dignity.

If we belong to Christ we are not, in the end, determined by divorce, or even by toxic marriages that are as bad as a divorce. We do not have to accept the descriptions other human beings try to impose on us. We can forgive them, for they know not what they do. Even less do they know what they say. The greatest anguish of a child from this background lies in the desire to be "heard" for themselves, rather than to have one's identity objectified and defined by others. The horrible suspicion that there is no one out there who will listen can give rise to the desire to annihilate that very identity, and ultimately one's whole existence. The voice of the contradictor whispers in our ear that we should never have been born. We have nothing to contribute. No one will ever take us seriously. To be the child of divorce is to be aborted, perpetually. Never to be allowed our place.

And yet, in Christ, we can actually give the love we should like to have received ourselves, most especially to those who are tempted to despair. We can be prophets of Hope. "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over."

The Love They Lost

COLET C. BOSTICK

Staal, Stephanie, *The Love They Lost: Living with the Legacy of Our Parents' Divorce* (Dell Publishing, 2000, 246 pages).

The explosion of divorce in the 1960s and 1970s has brought about a generation in which half its members have grown up in broken homes. In *The Love They Lost*, Stephanie Staal argues that while research has been done on the effects of divorce on society, culture, and the family as a whole, there seems to be little room for the voices of those most affected: the children of divorce.

Staal, herself a child of divorce, has written a book that is a combination of personal memoir and journalistic feature story. Her parents divorced when she was thirteen, but she feels the real trauma of this event has come in her adult years when she is trying to form attachments of her own. Unsatisfied with the dry conclusions of statisticians and sociologists, Staal turns to other members of the "divorce generation" to discover what is lacking in her understanding of love and relationships.

Staal turns what could have been a collection of raw data into a narrative of raw emotion. The heart-breaking experiences of 120 children of divorce are woven into an analysis of how events of the past shape the perception of the present. The disintegration of these families left these children not only with pieces of lives, but also planted seeds of self-doubt and distrust that have come to fruition in their adulthood. Rather than a one-time event, divorce becomes "a theme that permeates our lives." Not having a model from which to work, these individuals must construct an understanding of how healthy relationships function from less than nothing: they only know what not to do. Further, since a child's self-perception is so damaged by the breakup of the family, a majority of these individuals do not think they are worthy or capable of having a relationship that does not end in rejection. Left without a home or a compass, adult children of divorce become "emotional nomads," drifting in and out of relationships, hoping for love and stability but never knowing how to achieve it.

The problem is laid out in startling and convincing detail, but Staal's conclusion is flat

and disappointing. After enumerating the devastating repercussions of a life lived in the shadow of divorce, the final section, "Rebuilding Relationships, Rediscovering Love," devolves into postmodernist drivel. In a strange turn, the author begins to lament the fetters of "traditionalism" and "gender barriers" - terms and concepts mentioned only in the last few pages - and declares that any and all kinds of relationships are legitimate, as long as we define them "in our own way." Cohabitation is not examined or questioned, just accepted as normative. For all the research Staal has done, it seems important statistics (such as the increased divorce rate among cohabitating couples) were overlooked or ignored. The author desperately wants to find a safe passage for herself and fellow victims of divorce, but does not even think to examine the presuppositions of the culture that helped form the conditions for the breakdown of the family in the first place.

The Love They Lost is an excellent chronicling of the pain and confusion that are the inheritance of children of divorce. It gives an invaluable perspective on the experience of living a fractured life. Sadly, however, even its conclusions are a symptom of the brokenness produced by the divorce culture rather than an antidote. We are still waiting for a work that is able to combine Staal's insight into this subjective dimension of the experience of divorce with an understanding of the child's objective need to grow in a family that understands and respects marriage.

Marriage: A History

LISA LICKONA

Coontz, Stephanie, *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (Penguin Books, 2005).

The author's noble cause is to disabuse us once and for all of the notion that the 1950s Ozzie-and-Harriet, nuclear, male-breadwinner family was the pinnacle of family life. Through an exhaustive history that begins with prehistoric man and ends in the present day, Coontz convincingly argues that the companionate marriage, the marriage for love, traces its origins not to a decadent 1960s, but rather to the eighteenth century, when unprecedented changes in society occurred that made young people more independent of their families and communities. Before that, marriage was all about in-laws - that is, the economic and political connections that were made through the union - and therefore far too important to be left up to the whims of two inexperienced young people. Even when, in the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church made consent the definitive factor for the validity of a marriage, the engaged persons were hardly "free" in any modern sense to choose a spouse; engagements were closely overseen by parents, clergy, and feudal lords.

Despite the fact that the shift in the purpose of marriage has led to marriage becoming "optional and more brittle" (306) in recent decades, Coontz believes that it is boon for women. In her conclusion, she quotes the anguished journal entries of women from the pre-love era who beg God to give them the grace to be faithful in the face of abusive or unkind husbands. Persevering when the spouse is boring, lazy, unproductive, annoying, lacking direction, dirty, rude, temperamental, unpredictable, nasty, prone to emotional swings - for Coontz, this is the essence of what we have escaped in the modern companionate marriage. But this raises more questions than it answers. Isn't the woman (or man) who perseveres in the face of a difficult marriage also living a marriage "for love?" And who do these men and women stick it out for, if not for the children whom they love? It is disappointing that a history of marriage says so little about children as a reason for marrying at any point in human history.

Indeed, Coontz rarely mentions the ends of marriage that lie beyond the self and its

desire for greater returns through marriage - be they economic, political, or affectionate. And, as if she knows she might be pressed on this point, she tells us that returning to the era before love conquered marriage would be as impossible as returning to the handcrafted life of the pre-industrial era. But what Coontz misses is that morality, unlike material progress, is played out anew in the history of each human person (cf. Pope Benedict's *Spe Salvi*, n. 24). And a sense of marriage as grounded in self-giving love that has the form of a lifelong vow has both historical precedent and modern defenders.

Untying the Knot

KATHLEEN CRANE VIDMAR

Metz, Tamara, *Untying the Knot: Marriage, the State, and the Case for their Divorce* (Princeton University Press, 2010, 205 pgs.).

As the national debate over same-sex marriage rages across the country, Tamara Metz, assistant professor of political science and humanities at Reed College in Oregon, asks individuals on both sides of the contentious issue to step away from the terms of the debate as they currently stand, and consider a question that everyone seems to be taking for granted: why is the United States government involved in the business of defining and controlling marriage at all?

In her book *Untying the Knot: Marriage, the State, and the Case for their Divorce*, Metz argues that the fundamental tenets of liberal political philosophy, when pushed to their logical conclusions, provide no grounds upon which the state can demonstrate a legitimate interest in being involved in the establishment of marriage. Situating herself in the political tradition of Locke, Mill, and Rawls, she asserts that a liberal commitment to the separation of church/state, private/public, and meaning/materiality is threatened by the establishment of marriage, an institution which exists on both sides of all that liberalism must divide in order to be truly itself. Furthermore, she argues that gendered marriage poses a positive threat to liberal commitments to stability, equality, and liberty insofar as it relies on, reinforces, and perpetuates a societal system that rests on power structures. She believes these structures render women vulnerable to dependency, exploitation, and abuse, as well as being positively oppressive of all persons who do not conform to what she terms "societally constructed gender norms." For these reasons, she argues that marriage, like the Church in America, ought to be disestablished.

Metz builds her argument carefully. Beginning with *Maynard v. Hill* in 1888 and ending with *In re Marriage Cases* in 2008, Metz searches for reasons the U.S. courts have found to support the establishment of marriage. Likewise, she traces out the thoughts of several of the liberal political tradition's most prominent voices to understand the fundamental tenets at work in support of our current practice. She

concludes that for the sake of meeting public welfare aims, the state has a clear interest in supporting the intimate care giving which often takes place in and through the family bonds created by marriage, but this does not generate a state interest in marriage per se. In drawing this distinction, she claims that the state has assumed, but not adequately justified the establishment of marriage. Why?

While the state may have a compelling interest to support what Metz terms the "material side" of marriage, it has proven unable to untangle itself from the "meaning side" of marriage to which the material side seems to be inextricably joined. Though not its intention, the state ends up taking on a role which it is expressly forbidden to assume by the liberal canon - that is, acting as a de facto "mediator of meaning," having a hand in shaping the public's ideas and beliefs about ultimate realities, blurring the lines between the personal and the public, and failing to maintain its neutrality.

In addition to the disestablishment of marriage, Metz proposes the creation of an Intimate Care Giving Union (ICGU) status. She admits that an ICGU status might look similar to current civil marriage in that it would afford legal protection, establish lines of rights and responsibilities, and provide material benefits such as tax breaks. It would differ however in that it would be built around the "caretaker-dependent dyad" as opposed to the gendered married couple, and could include same-sex couples or non-sexual care-giving units comprised of any number of people. This would provide care giving (as opposed to marriage) with all and only those benefits needed from the state (so the state might benefit in return).

We see that Metz's methodical presentation rests explicitly upon some of the most fundamental assumptions of political liberalism. We cannot address every assumption, but let us deal here with three specifically. First, that there must be a clear separation between the spheres of the private and the public; second, that laws are juridical in nature, serving only to create a space for individuals to define their own concept of "existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life" (Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 1992); and third, that a person is understood in anthropological terms as first a genderless, autonomous individual who decides to enter into community with others. We see that Metz' proposal of the ICGU status is the unfolding of these tenets pushed to their logical conclusions.

Those who would offer a critique of Metz's position might begin by calling into question these paradigmatic assumptions of liberalism, demonstrating the inadequacies of a Cartesian conception of the separation between private and public,

suggesting that laws, by their nature, carry within themselves a conception of ultimate meaning whether the liberal state intends this or not. Further, one only has to reflect on his or her own experience to realize that no person decides to enter into that most basic human community, the family.

One might not have to work as hard as one might think to convince Metz herself that these challenges to liberalism hold weight. A close reading of her work shows that she herself opens the door wide to a critique of her position running along these lines.

First, as she states early on, "Human beings are not, as often advertised in the liberal canon, fundamentally independent." Rather, our experience reveals that "interdependence is [our] unavoidable state" (p. 13). Our interdependency speaks of an inherent vulnerability in each person, and she argues that it is the intimate care given freely to those most vulnerable in the smallest units of society that the state has an interest in protecting. She proposes her ICGU status as a means of "negotiating" the tensions that arise between androgynous individuals who have chosen to be intimately connected. While applauding Metz for acknowledging the inherent relationality of the human person, one might ask if her ICGU status, as a sort of microcosmic social contract, does not presuppose the same autonomous individual that she herself suggests does not exist in reality. Does she really insist that a presentation of human interdependence in strictly androgynous terms is likewise most true to our experience?

Second, in building her argument for the state to disentangle itself from civil marriage, she admits that our current laws "alter the behavior and belief" of American citizens about the meaning of marriage, inculcating what she sees as an oppressive heteronormity. Nevertheless, in this moment she acknowledges that laws teach (p. 97). One might ask if she believes this is only the case in laws regarding marriage, or is this principle extends to all laws? If so, what conception of the human person and community are taught by a law establishing an ICGU status, which seeks to separate (and not just distinguish between) gendered marriage and family?

Third, Metz's most striking self-critique comes in her final chapter where she reconsiders the meaning of the public/private divide. Though her argument for the disestablishment of marriage rests squarely on her proposal that state neutrality is compromised and the line between public and private is threatened by the state's involvement with marriage, she accepts that several liberal theorists argue that this very same line is an illusion and "that it hardly describes anything about real life" (p. 156, emphasis mine)!

What this last statement reflects is perhaps the most problematic of the foundational liberal assumptions, one which Metz does not address directly; namely, the separation between law and what the Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition terms human nature. When this separation plays itself out, one sees that the state ends up creating laws that "hardly describe anything about real life," and therefore undermine society's advancement toward the very ideals of authentic stability, equality, and liberty that it sets out to uphold in the first place. Though Metz will certainly disagree, it can be argued that the institution of an ICGU status, which presupposes that anthropology is androgynous and law and freedom are at odds with an embrace of human nature, would be no exception.

In summary, Metz's conclusions are nuanced. At the same time, while she attempts to honestly address the contradictions in the liberal tradition as she understands them, she does not go far enough to free her argument of its logical inconsistencies. After hearing her out, we can thank her for making one point particularly clear: the issue of the liberal state's interest in marriage is a clear nexus point which shines a bright light on the inherent problems of the basic tenets of the liberal tradition, particularly its anthropological assumptions. In conclusion, we will agree with Metz that the success or failure of liberalism's ability to address the institution of marriage rests upon its willingness to allow itself to be informed from within by categories which do not describe "real life," and that a people's understanding of the meaning of their lives and of reality is inextricably bound up with marriage and the family.

Unexpected Legacy

WILLIAM R. HAMANT

Wallerstein, Judith S., Lewis, Julia M., and Blakeslee, Sandra, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25-Year Landmark Study* (Hyperion, 2000, 351 pages).

In her extraordinary study, Judith S. Wallerstein follows the children of divorce over the span of twenty-five years, asking how the pivotal event of divorce shaped their childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood. Methodologically, the sample size is small, and her conversations with children of divorce unscripted. Her interlocutors are the adult children of both divorced and "intact" families, including intact families that faced great difficulties and yet somehow managed not to divorce. Wallerstein chose families from the same neighborhood, so as to guarantee relative socio-economic parity: for the study to work, the defining difference had to be the fact of divorce.

Wallerstein wants to be able to go deeply into the lives of those she interviews, spending hours in face-to-face conversation, so as to get to "the human experience behind the statistics" (p. xxxvii). The book, as a result, is narrative in style, and easily accessible. The reader is invited to follow the stories of lives impacted by divorce, and to experience, with Wallerstein, the surprise that she herself experienced at the consequences of "culture of divorce." Thus the narrative style serves to reinforce one of the key theses of the book: that with the relaxation of divorce laws that took place in the 1970s, "[w]e embarked on a giant social experiment without any idea about how the next generation would be affected" (p. xxviii). And these effects, which are well documented, are serious: the children of divorce have a greater likelihood of behavioral issues in school; they engage in earlier, more frequent, and riskier sexual experimentation (p. 28); they are more likely to use drugs; they are less likely to go to college (p. 253); and they have a lower marriage rate and a higher divorce rate than their peers from intact families (p. xxix; see also p. 197). Divorce causes an emotional separation between parents and children (xxx). And contrary to the hope characteristic of this great "social experiment," these effects are anything but temporary, lingering for decades after the divorce and imparting a kind of indelible "stamp" upon the children: for the remainder of their lives, in their own eyes, they will

always be children of divorce (pp. 62, 291). It is important to note that Wallerstein is not against divorce; but she does think that society needs to take an honest look at its expectations for and myths surrounding it, and admit that divorce creates a host of serious problems even as it tries to solve others.

The book explores, in five parts, the lives of five adult children of divorce, as well as a number of their peers from intact families. The parts are differentiated by the level of animosity between the parents, and by the effect of the divorce upon the children. It is not necessary here to summarize the structure of the book, which Wallerstein does well in her Introduction (esp. pp. xxxvii-xxxviii). Let us instead touch upon what is perhaps the most striking feature of the study, namely, the evidence that it provides in support of a particular anthropology.

In the first place, the anthropology supported by Wallerstein's study is one that gives pride of place to the family as possessing a structure. This natural structure is unique: a divorced family, Wallerstein asserts, is not the same family, but a new form of family, with different demands upon parents and children (p. 10). Divorce negatively and profoundly impacts family roles (pp. 126; 236-53). The divorce was viewed as the "end of childhood" for these children - in both the children's and the parents' eyes (p. 26; see also p. 11). In reminiscing upon their childhood, for instance, children of divorce rarely talked about their play - a fact that is all the more important when one considers the role that play has in how children explore imaginatively the adult world they will one day inhabit (pp. 18-19). Divorce further impacted gender roles: Wallerstein noted a sad pervasiveness of passivity among men who were children of divorce, who would simply sit back and let the women make the decision when their relationship got tough (p. 77). Women, too, came to adopt all of the most unhealthy traits usually associated with men: using their partners, exploiting them, manipulating them, and leaving them, all as an expression of a distorted form of power (p. 189). Such instances provide a kind of mirror-image proof that the family is characterized by a natural structure that retaliates upon both parents and children when it is violated. As with any distortion, these perversions of relationality and of one's place within a communion point in their negativity to truth: The family is a "school" where children learn what it takes to make a marriage (74).

A second, and related, feature of Wallerstein's anthropology is that the family, in its structure, has a cohesion, in which the whole is greater than the parts. For this reason, the children relate to their parents, not simply as individuals, but as a unit; the children's relationship with their parents is greatly influenced by how well the parents relate to one another. This is not only the case with good marriages: in bad

marriages too, children feel protected by good parenting, which is the result of the two parents working together, even while at odds with one another (pp. 51, 242). This kind of cooperation is, in fact, essential for the development even of infants, who are able to grow and explore the world around them on the basis of the security provided by an intact marriage (p. 217). So universal is this need that it manifests itself even in divorces where the marriage suffered from domestic violence: the children often becoming abusers, taking on the role of the abusing parent in a bid to take power over the situation and restore life as it had been (p. 96; cf. p. 124).

Children, in other words, need parents with a strong marriage: we are dependent upon the stability of this relationship. Wallerstein says explicitly: "[children] want and need virtuous parents" (p. 287). We could say (though Wallerstein does not use these terms) that the impact that a strong marriage has upon the identity of the child illustrates that growing up is not about becoming "independent," but about learning self-gift (cf. pp. 32-3). Conversely, the parents' relationship with their children can also be affected by their relationship to one another: one father reported to Wallerstein that he had no feelings for his children because he had no love for his ex-wife (p. 140), and in families with children with special needs, the parents have a more difficult time after a divorce taking seriously the vulnerability of their child. A stable marriage, in other words, facilitates the parents' own call to be a gift to their children (p. 229).

Thirdly, this cohesiveness extends beyond the boundaries of the atomic family, giving us a sense of tradition and history. In the family we are connected to our past and opened up to our future. This sense of origin and finality is destroyed by divorce (p. 22). Particularly for younger children, the loss with tradition was experienced as the loss of the future: activities and studies lose their meaning - we could say, their telos (p. 171). When the children become adults, they are far less likely to have a close relationship with their parents, particularly with their fathers (pp. 82, 139, 203). Tragically, the children of divorce have less interest in their own parents becoming grandparents, a fact that Wallerstein compellingly interprets as a subconscious refusal by children to offer to their divorced parents the grateful gift of the child, which is universally a symbol of the promise that the family will endure into the future (p. 68).

Fourth, the personal character of the individual is dependent upon the family. Divorce, Wallerstein argues, "objectifies" the children, a fact that is painfully experienced in arguments over visitation "rights" (pp. 176, 180, 182). Furthermore, divorce often replaces love with legalism, as seen in the case of fathers who refuse to pay for their children's college education. "I did all that I was legally required to do," is the common

refrain (p. 252). Relationships, in other words, are dependent upon the family structure (p. 183). This is an important lesson for our society, which often protests that marriage is "just a piece of paper" that changes nothing essential about the underlying reality. In fact, love, which is characterized by generosity, requires a structure, a form, without which even the most fundamental relationships devolve into a form of justice that should govern the interactions of strangers.

An important question that Wallerstein leaves unasked, however, is whether the divorce culture is really a divorce sub-culture. In other words, it is tragically clear from her study what the effects of divorce are for those whose families are shattered by it. It is not clear what effects divorce has on those who do not go through it; in fact, one of the primary characteristics of her methodology, as we have said, is to contrast children from divorced families with those whose families are intact. What empirical evidence, therefore, is there for a "divorce culture"? How does the divorce of another family undermine the stability of my own? Unquestionably, the cultural transformations surrounding marriage in recent decades have been massive. Wallerstein's study could, in theory, provide important clues as to how.

Transform Your Marriage

BETHANY MEOLA

Gottman, John M. and Gottman, Julie Schwarz with DeClaire, Joan, 10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage (Three Rivers Press, 2006).

John and Julie Gottman, a husband-and-wife team of marriage counselors, craft their book *10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage* as a series of marriage therapy vignettes. Ten couples, ten dysfunctional marriages, ten visits to the Gottmans' Love Lab, and ten transformative lessons about marriage.

Each chapter is structured in a similar way. A married couple is introduced and their situation is described in brief: one couple is struggling to heal from an affair; another is adjusting to parenthood. Each finds themselves snarled in one dysfunctional habit or another. After this lead-in, the lights dim and the spouses take center stage: a dialogue between them is recorded verbatim beside a running commentary by the Gottmans, who highlight both negative and positive communication decisions. Then, after some focused coaching, the couple converses again, this time with far more positive interactions than before. Each chapter concludes with fill-in exercises and questionnaires designed to invite the reader into the Love Lab and experience the ten transformative lessons firsthand.

10 Lessons has some important strengths. Like other books by John Gottman, such as *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (1994), attention is given to the emotional/physiological interactions that take place during communication. For example, a stressful conversation might induce "flooding" in one spouse, where the heart rate spikes and adrenaline levels may be elevated. "Emotional stress," write the Gottmans in the analysis of one couple, "has caused the many parts of [the husband's] nervous system to become so overloaded that it's difficult for him to think straight and communicate..." (p.44). The interplay between thought and physical response, one might say, is an expression of man's intimate body-soul unity and thus expressive of a trustworthy anthropology.

And yet the Gottmans occasionally seem to suppose a somewhat "angelic" or

unembodied anthropology. Much emphasis is placed on restoring the emotional connection between spouses that have "drifted apart," as the saying goes - and this even in situations where husband and wife would probably accomplish more by means of a good night's sleep, a hot shower, a good breakfast, and a brisk walk! In other words, the authors at times seem to minimize the obvious bodily factors that complicate their patients' emotional lives. Who hasn't experienced a period of angst that, as it turned out, had more to do with a sleepless night than with an intractable dilemma?

Another strength of *10 Lessons* is that it chooses wisely to ignore the increasingly common belief that sometimes marriages "just fail." As an example in this vein, consider a statement by Michael G. Lawler [in *The Jurist* 55 (1995): 236] that "a marriage is consummated and permanent only when the marital love in which it is founded is consummated and permanent." In this view no marriage is a priori indissoluble; indissolubility is proved by, well, not dissolving. Yes, it is to be expected that marriage counselors will work to keep a marriage together; after all, one's reputation could suffer if too many couples head straight from the marital therapy couch to divorce court. And yet it remains admirable that nowhere do the Gottmans tell a couple, "Yep, you're right - it does sound like your marriage is all washed up. We advise you both to cut the charade and find someone more compatible." No marriage is beyond repair for the authors.

And yet despite their wise choice not to listen to the anti-permanence crowd, the Gottmans seem to capitulate to the false idea that certain sins, particularly in the realm of sexuality, are without victims and even without effects. At the least, couples in the book who have cohabited, who are "childless by choice," who had sex before marriage, and so on, seem to experience no discernible fallout in their marriage from these decisions. True, perhaps none of the effects of these prior decisions bubbled up in the specific therapy sessions highlighted here. And yet if Christian teaching is correct that "sin...injures and weakens the sinner himself" and "harms...communion" (Catechism, nos. 1459, 953), then it's only to be expected that the consequences of disordered choices (especially if unrepented and unabsolved) may show up in marriage therapy.

Another strength of *10 Lessons* is that the featured couples span various ages; even grandparents have further to progress in the art of love! The Gottmans also offer sound and refreshing advice about marriage and children: a child-centered marriage is not a good idea, they say. Indeed, in an era where parenthood seldom dares to admit that it is anything less than meticulously planned, parents are tempted to think that

their marriage should take a backseat while they invest 110% into their children. Not so, say the Gottmans. Ironically, parents so focused on providing their children with a happy home can miss the very thing most important for their children's happiness: their parents' healthy marriage. In this vein, it's striking that the Gottmans choose the very same word to describe the home - a "cradle" - as does Bl. John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici*. The Gottmans write, "We often encourage couples to think of their marriage as they would a cradle. It's here in the safety of your stable, loving relationship that your child's heart can rest" (p. 233). (Compare to John Paul II: "The family... is the cradle of life and love" - *Christifideles Laici*, no. 40).

The last example is emblematic, as well, of Gottmans' treatment of religion and faith - or rather, non-treatment. If religion is mentioned at all, it is a passing background detail. None of the couples speak of faith as a formative influence in their lives or their marriage, and the Gottmans never ask about it. One is led to wonder whether all of the couples selected were card-carrying atheists. Or is it that religion is not a "practical help" when it comes to marriage difficulties? Surely there is wisdom about marriage that can be gained even without a formal credo. And yet, as demonstrated by the Gottmans' brush with John Paul II's language, religion has thought quite a good deal about marriage and family life. (Incidentally, the lack of religion in *10 Lessons* reminded me of a bridal magazine I browsed during wedding planning. Out of the ten "real weddings" featured, not one was in a church. Not one? Is that even statistically accurate?) One is left to wonder what, if anything, faith contributes to one's marriage.

For this reviewer, the most problematic aspect of *10 Lessons* is its reduction of marriage to a matter of communication - if not in theory, then certainly in practice. It has no "ontological" dimension. The weight of each transformative lesson is a new communication technique, and the goal of each session is more intimate, more successful communication. This raises many questions in light of man's embodiment. What role does the body play? Does touch count as communication? And with such an emphasis on what might be called the rational abilities of man, what about a marriage where one spouse has lost the ability to talk, hear, or reason? It's hard to tell what advice the Gottmans could give to a husband whose wife had advanced Alzheimer's.

As a whole, *10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage* offered much in way of practical marriage advice, a la tips and strategies. The technique of opening up the marital therapy room to observers, so to speak, provided an authenticity to the Gottmans' suggestions beyond what would have been gained by principles alone. Despite leaving

several unanswered questions, particularly as regards faith and the role of the body, the Gottmans offer helpful advice to struggling couples with their wealth of accumulated knowledge. As with any book of practical tips by authors who may not share the fullness of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family, the book should be read in the light of the Church's authentic teaching, which never contradicts right reason.

The Relationship Cure

JULIE E. HELDT

Gottman, John M., *The Relationship Cure* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).

Dr. John Gottman is the cofounder and codirector of the Gottman Institute (a for-profit therapist training entity), Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Washington in Seattle and heads The Relationship Research Institute with his wife, Dr Julie Schwartz. He is a New York Times bestselling author and has been a guest of Good Morning America, 20/20, and The Oprah Winfrey Show. Considered a leading expert in maintaining and improving relationships and marital stability, his work and thought are in popular demand, especially on the subject of divorce.

In *The Relationship Cure*, one of many books in a series on improving intimate relationships, Dr Gottman suggests a practical program for enabling people in to share and respond to each other's "emotional information." The program is applicable to many forms of relationship, including spousal, paternal, and business. He suggests that the successful transaction of emotional information promotes healthy communication. Healthy communication, in turn, creates a sense of connection. When people feel connected, he says, they get along and are capable of sharing in life's joys and burdens. According to his research, the more this happens, the more satisfying relationships become, while conflict is reduced and transformed into an opportunity to stay connected and engaged. Since failure to connect, he writes, is a major cause of the culture's high divorce rate, learning to share and respond to emotional information is vital.

Dr Gottman's practical self-help program begins by defining the act of sharing emotional information as a "bid." This original concept is the fundamental unit of emotional communication. A bid, he goes on to say, can be placed through a gesture, facial expression, tone of voice, word or touch. In fact, it is impossible not to communicate in this way, he argues. "Whether you smile or maintain a blank face, look straight ahead or down at the ground, reach out and touch or hold back, you are communicating and others will attach meaning to that communication" (170). Next Dr Gottman defines the three categories into which responses to bids of

communication fall. The first is a "turning-toward response," which may include full attention, eye contact, and the offering of opinions, thoughts or feelings. The second is a "turning-away response" which is failing to pay attention to another's bid by being preoccupied, ignoring completely or focusing on irrelevant aspects of the bid or offering altogether unrelated information. The third and most harmful category is the "turning-against response." This includes contemptuous, belligerent, domineering, contradictory, critical, or defensive reactions.

Building awareness of the concepts defined above is the first of five steps toward building and maintaining healthy intimate relationships. The second step in the proposed cure is discovering how the brain's emotional command system, based on physiology, affects the bidding process. The command system is defined as the nerve-based circuits that coordinate electrochemical signals in the brain. This would be responsible for pre-determining certain characteristics like a person's temperament. A series of questionnaires is offered to help identify an individual's most dominant command systems and to explain how they can contribute to emotional well-being. The third step involves using survey questions to examine emotional heritage and its impact on the ability to connect to different bidding styles. Considering behavioral patterns within families their transmission across generations would be an example of this.

The fourth step in the cure is developing emotional communication skills. This is done by studying and observing all the ways in which the body can communicate meaning, learning to pay attention to and express feelings, developing an ability to listen, and pinpointing important rituals or traditions to respect and/or recreate. In this section, examples of body language and rituals are listed as a starting point for identification.

The fifth and final step in the cure is learning to find and identify shared meaning with others. This includes learning to recognize the idealism and vision of another's position in order to find areas of common ground, or learning to recognize and respect another's vision and goals. It leads the reader easily into the concluding chapter on "applying what you've learned." This chapter offers a variety of exercises for building and strengthening emotional connections by utilizing all the information gained through working with steps 1 to 5.

While The Relationship Cure offers practical advice which is based on decades of research and clinical experience, it is difficult, at least from this book, to derive a deeper understanding from it of the nature of marriage and the person. It is clear that Dr Gotmann desires to help people recognize and respond to even the subtlest of

loving and attentive gestures, with the hope of reducing the number of divorces and unhealthy relationships, but why he believes it is so important to do so remains obscure. Perhaps this is a topic discussed at greater length in another of his books. Based on the absence of a deeper vision of marriage and the person, this book may best be approached by a community of readers who are proactively trying to maintain or tune-up a marriage, and where a notion of the sanctity of marriage and dignity of the person is already presupposed. A reader who is looking for a reason to defend or fight for even the unhealthiest of relationships may find the text a bit superficial or wanting.

Suggesting itself as primarily a workbook, the text does offer simple and useful suggestions for responding to bids from the most aggressive to the most passive in nature, and helps a responder identify how he may be missing a crucial message. It is clear that the work's primary aim consists of learning to build successful relationships through nurturing intimacy. This is accomplished, albeit in a workbook fashion, through the recognition of the person as an "other" who is equipped with his own method for bidding, and learning to identify - and perhaps adjust - methods of sharing emotional information to create more successful transactions. I agree, as Gottman suggests, that this will encourage the ebb and flow of authentic communication and reduce the risk of divorce by nurturing more meaningful relationships.

Is Marriage a Closed System?

KATE IADIPAULO

Gottman, John, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail... And How You Can Make Yours Last* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, 234 pages).

To speak of marriage as "sacramental" is to say that, at the core, marriage is an open thing. In its very design, marriage (as sacrament) is open to the Infinite and thus open to becoming increasingly the image of the Infinite in its expansiveness and fecundity. This is to say that built into the very order of marriage is a constitutive generosity which becomes manifest as fruitfulness. Rather than a hermetically sealed package, marriage is open at both ends - a vessel into which life is poured for the purpose of passing on life. The essential exclusivity and permanence of the marital bond are not threatened by this openness because it is first a vertical openness - an aperture to the transcendent God and through him to generations before and to come. Far from endangering marriage, this openness is what guarantees its vitality.

What happens to the marital bond when the mind of a culture loses its grasp on the essential openness of marriage? What becomes of a culture when marriage is understood to be an essentially closed system - a kind of world unto itself, created and ruled only by the decision of the spouses? Even without reflecting at length on statistics of out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, and divorce, it is safe to assert that in the cultural mind (and as a result in cultural reality), marriage has been destabilized in recent times. The sheer volume of books in the "self-help/marriage" category indicates that a pervasive question on people's minds is: "How can marriage be restored?"

Dr John Gottman's goal is "filling in the knowledge gap" about why our marriages have become so fragile in order to help prevent the downward spiral to divorce. His opening chapter is entitled "What makes a marriage work?" He continues with chapters on marriage styles, the "downward spiral," the differences between men and women, "diagnosing your marriage," and strengthening the foundations of your marriage... all with diagnostic tests for the reader scattered throughout.

The strength of Gottman's book is the sheer amount of time and attention he has put into observing in detail interactions between spouses in order to understand the inner dynamics of conjugal communication. For two decades he and his team have observed hundreds of married couples as they communicated with each other on a variety of issues affecting their marriage. In this comprehensive longitudinal research, they have monitored heart rates, breathing, and other physiological responses. His team has encoded facial expressions, read body language, and sought self-reports from the husbands and wives they observed.

But the book lacks a chapter entitled "What is marriage and what is it for?" Gottman seems to embrace a view of marriage as a "closed system." He writes: "Like the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which says that in closed energy systems things tend to run down and get less orderly, the same seems to be true of closed relationships like marriages" (p. 61). Marriage is an impermeable circle enclosing wife and husband. Again we read: "If your marriage has been rocky, you may wonder, So just what are sufficient grounds for remaining married? While each couple must discover their own answer to this question, my research suggests some answers" (p. 223, emphasis added). Note that the individual choice of the couple is the deciding factor in this important decision. A difficulty clearly arises when a couple fails to agree on such a decision to this and other crucial questions. Further, should not the question at least minimally be the converse - what are sufficient grounds for abandoning your marriage and the person you promised to stay with until death? Gottman falters on these questions, it seems, because of an insufficient understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage.

When the nature and purpose of marriage are believed to vary widely from one married couple to another, any discussion of ethical content in marital dialogue and disagreement breaks down. Unable to reliably speak on content (the what), the focus shifts to method (the how). Over and over, Gottman emphasizes a primacy of method over content: he writes: "much more important than having compatible views is how the couples work out their differences" (pp. 23-4), and "I may surprise you by claiming that you ought not to worry so much about solving your marital problems as in dealing with the emotions they stir" (p.175).

While it is indeed important to master our emotions, they may also serve as signals that there is indeed something wrong about what is happening. One example may here suffice. In a conversation video-taped in Gottman's lab, "Yvonne" and "Nicholas" are discussing Yvonne's jealousy toward his ex-girlfriends in their marriage. Nicholas

is bothered that Yvonne would be upset if, hypothetically speaking, he were to have lunch with a former girlfriend, Jeannie. Here are excerpts of their conversation:

YVONNE: (Slightly alarmed) No, Jeannie is a different story. You were lovers...

... NICHOLAS: She's a person that I once liked a lot, and it's a shame to lose touch with her. As a friend. As an acquaintance.

...YVONNE: (Fearful) Wait a minute! Do you want to see her? Is that what you are saying?

NICHOLAS: Yes I would. Why not? I'd like to find out how she's doing, talk to her again. Yes.

YVONNE: (Flooded) Then I think we have a serious problem... (pp. 111-12)

Yvonne ended the conversation in the state of being "flooded" (emotionally and physiologically overwhelmed). This state, Gottman advises, can be harmful to your marriage. But is not having lunch with your ex-lover - particularly when it upsets your wife - also harmful to your marriage? Is not their serious problem greater than the wife's emotional reaction? Upon this question, Gottman is strangely silent. It is the method of communication that is important here, not the content of the conversation.

As Gottman glosses over the content of discussions on church-going (pp. 47-49) and lunch with ex-girlfriends, one sees that as long as the spouses can mutually agree on their course of action, all options seem to bear equal moral weight. This democratization of options fails to account for different categories of decisions (for example, that deciding "in which neighborhood we will live" is not so weighty a decision as "whether or not we will be open to having children"). Herein lies one difficulty of Gottman's approach: There can be no objective moral standard by which to judge action because marriage is presumed to be an essentially closed system formed entirely by its subjects, the spouses.

Positively, Gottman asserts with clear eyes that keeping a marriage, or salvaging an endangered one, will require much effort from the spouses. The steps he outlines in his book require "vigilance and commitment," they may demand changes in perception, and in order to work need the force of habit akin to virtue (p. 30). He rightly points out that "Nobody wants to bear full responsibility for another's happiness," and that stable couples have been shown to accept the limitations of their marriage and spouse (p. 223). His extensive research on the ties between emotion and

physiological response undergird a worldview that holds to the unity of body and soul (cf. pp. 115ff). These things are all worth remembering as they may contribute to the building up of marriage.

Gottman's research is impressive and his goals laudable. In the final analysis, though, his contribution to the restoration of marriage is sabotaged by his presupposition that marriage is a closed thing - more an opus of the couple than a gift received. As such, his book is recommended only as strictly supplemental to other resources on marriage, and even then presuming a prior solid foundation. His steps and suggestions are good for self-reflection, and they could be helpful if a couple is already otherwise formed in an authentic understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage.

Marriage is something given to us, not something recreated as each new set of members joins its ranks. It is an aperture to the divine and the source of all fecundity. In marriage, humanity has the unique privilege of being custodian of something much greater than itself - a tremendous reality has been entrusted to us, one which we did not create. The order of marriage is a given. The task of marriage is ours to take up.

Birthright

KATE IADIPAULO

Fraiberg, Selma, *Every Child's Birthright: In Defense of Mothering* (New York: Basic Books, 1977, 189 page).

Why review a book 36 years after its publication? Perhaps because we can look forward more clearly by first looking back: this book is doubly relevant for so many parents of young children because it speaks not only about how we ought to raise our children, but also about how we ourselves were raised. The year 1977 gave us the Census data for a Current Population Survey (CPS) called Trends in Child Care Arrangements of Working Mothers which “addressed the issue of childcare as a constraint on women seeking employment” (emphasis added). This simple statement discloses much: childcare is treated as a burden to the adult, as it still is, while women (and men) are “constrained” by the high cost, inconvenience, or lack of quality care centers available. Arguably the greatest merit of Selma Fraiberg’s book is that it helps us to understand this issue from the point of view of “these little ones” (Matthew 18:6), interjecting into the discussion of parental needs this simple (though jarring) statement: “the children are not faring well” (p. 154).

Many of the forces at work in the lives of children have accelerated since this book’s publication. The cultural trends are similar, though now more pronounced. Employment outside the home is the norm for both parents, with more mothers working than not – even mothers with very young children. In 2000, according to a child research data publication of the Children’s Defense Fund, 61% of mothers with children under three were in the labor force – that means millions of children under the age of three in substitute care situations. Though very often people rue the price of childcare, we very much need to focus on a different kind of cost.

Dr Fraiberg was a practicing child psychoanalyst and director of a project which treated emotionally troubled children in Michigan. In this book, she brings her experience and training to bear on the issues and outcomes related to the rearing of young children. She covers a lot of ground in the six chapters of *Every Child's Birthright*, jumping from imagined scenarios, to animal studies, to children in

institutions and foster homes, to courtrooms, to the history of welfare in the US, ending with a clarion call for child advocacy. The book is saved from utter fragmentation by the unifying thread which is Fraiberg's basic thesis: It is every child's birthright to be in a stable relationship with a caregiver – not only for the sake of meeting material needs, but also for the sake of providing the “nutriments” of love which constitute the basis of human attachments.

A particular strength of Fraiberg's book is its exploration of the formation of these basic human attachments. She explains how researchers have decoded a certain “dialogue” between baby and parents that begins at birth and continues on through the ordinary experiences of childhood in eye language, smile language, signs and signals. She then surveys some ancient traditions which have bound baby and parents together from the first hours of life. One example is found in breastfeeding: “the breast and the embrace were one for the baby,” satisfying hunger and offering comfort. When breastfeeding was the norm, mother and baby were largely bound together for the first year of life, thus guaranteeing appropriate circumstances for the formation of specific human attachment. There exists a wide-ranging scientific consensus about a certain critical period of formation: “the human qualities of enduring love and commitment to love are forged during the first two years of life” (p. 3), and yet the primary institution which has faithfully guarded proper human development, the family, is not itself well protected. Fraiberg's commentary is still eerily appropriate: “We are living in times when there are voices which denigrate the human family and even cry out for its dissolution or recomposition” (p. 4).

The animal studies referenced in chapter 2 are enlightening insofar as their results find parallels in human experience. Human primal and instinctual responses to severe deprivations look very much like reactions among certain higher-order animal species. One must be careful, however, not to be reductive – bearing in mind that our distance from the animals is not simply the evolution of a more complex mind. (A quick note on the Freudian two-drive theory she applies to understand the interplay of human love and aggression: the resultant anthropological understanding of the human person, with all the obvious caveats given such a lens, demands a more thorough exploration than can be reasonably accomplished in a book review.)

The more compelling part of chapter 2 deals with clinical studies of children robbed of ordinary family life by some tragedy. The studies (carefully carried out by distinguished scientists, with the proper experimental controls) focused on children in two groups: those in institutions (with no stable human partnerships) and those

raised in a succession of foster homes (who suffered ruptures of human ties in early development). An essential finding was that “children who have been deprived of mothering, and who have formed no personal human bonds during the first two years of life, show permanent impairment of the capacity to make human attachments in later childhood, even when substitute families are provided for them.” The degree of impairment, she explains, “is roughly equivalent to the degree of deprivation” (p. 59, emphasis added).

Lest we as a society should downplay the significance of such findings for the average child, Fraiberg points out that it is not only in institutions and successive foster care situations that children suffer. She also mentions children raised in homes with severely depressed, psychotic, or drug-addicted mothers who were essentially absent, as well as, notably, “a baby who is stored like a package” while his mother works, who may come to know many indifferent caretakers in his critical early years. This is a very bold indictment of the largely unquestioned institution we call “day care.” Child-care centers need to be examined, and even though a few might be found to be acceptable, nevertheless a child under the age of three is not well-served by them. Human attachment is not formed in a single moment or act, but by constant and repeated demonstrations of a parent’s love – by prolonged intimacy with a nurturing person. Even if one does not always correctly guess the child’s need, the important thing is that a constant person is consistently responding to the child’s expressive signs in some way. Children whose expressive signs are not read, due to institutional limitations or other absences, will lose the motivation to communicate their needs. If such needs are chronically unmet, the child can suffer permanent psychological damage.

An unattached child forms subsequent relationships on the basis of need satisfaction in which “one ‘need-satisfying person’ can substitute for another, quite independently of his personal qualities” (p. 60). Children unable to form attachments very often become unattached adults whose lives are also marked by transient partnerships “[s]ince no partner is valued, any one partner can be exchanged for any other” (p. 53). Long-term studies of unattached children reveal they suffer deficits in their ability to form attachments, in their conceptual thinking and language, and in their impulse control (especially as related to aggression). Sufferers of non-attachment conditions also exhibit an impoverished emotional range (no joy, grief, guilt, or remorse).

Fraiberg describes the effects such persons have on society: “These bondless men, women, and children constitute one of the largest aberrant populations in the world today, contributing far beyond their numbers to social disease and disorder. These are

the people who are unable to fulfill the most ordinary human obligations in work, in friendship, in marriage, and in child-rearing” (p. 70). Indeed, in the sexual promiscuity and violent tendencies of society, isn't it possible to see the shadow of the child who was never adequately affirmed in his tender years?

Fraiberg devotes a chapter to government policy as it affects the most vulnerable families. She advises a shift in budget priorities to compensate for assaults on family life, especially on the poorest families. She decries policies that incentivize fatherless households and encourage the mothers of small children to put their own children in day care in order to work. She knows there is a role for the wider community to play, but acknowledges that the destiny of our children is forged primarily in a mother's arms. Her book serves as a review of the state of affairs then and as a comparative tool now, but it is also a cautionary tale. Children deprived of their birthright – their right to conditions which foster their growth in love – may require “the whole colossal apparatus of psychiatric clinics and remedial education” in an attempt to help them to heal and to learn and to love. This is a very great cost indeed.

The Way They Were

MATTHEW NEWELL

Foster, Brooke Lea, *The Way They Were: Dealing with Your Parents' Divorce after a Lifetime of Marriage* (Three Rivers Press, 2006, 320 pages).

Brooke Lea Foster frames *The Way They Were* as a guide to help adult children (as opposed to young children) grieve their parents' divorce. Foster's thesis is that divorce damages young children and adult children equally but non-identically. Adult children especially suffer from an implicit expectation that, as adults, they will be able to cope somehow automatically with their parents' divorce, and concomitantly from a lack of support resources targeted at their particular situation. Foster offers her book as one such support resource, drawing loosely from sociological and psychological research and heavily from personal experience of her parents' divorce and personal interviews of similarly situated adult children.

The chapters address thematic areas of experience for adult children of divorce - the inevitability and necessity of grieving; the ways in which relationships between parents, siblings, extended family, and stepfamily are reconfigured or destroyed; the pervasive damaging effects of infidelity; and the potential for recapitulation of this damage in the relationships and marriages of adult children. Foster spends most of her chapters relating the experiential material that she has gathered, only occasionally offering the reader pieces of general advice on each theme. The primary points of each topic are reproduced at the end of each chapter in a bulleted list.

The book's best offerings are its concrete personal accounts of grief. It is impossible to read these experiences and miss the immense violence of divorce - indeed, as the weight of the material accumulates, the accounts become quite grueling to read. Foster writes with warmth and care, and her ability to display these facets of damage and suffering without trivialization or reduction is commendable.

Yet Foster is not as successful when she moves from experience to advice or analysis.

Firstly and most obviously, her advice and analysis is very abstract, and its usefulness depends on the reader's ability to concretize it. "Establish boundaries early," for example, in itself says very little and sounds like a platitude. But secondly and most importantly, Foster's treatment of these matters is entirely contiguous with the popular wisdom of the culture, and so, from a Christian perspective, recapitulates the terms of the problem in her proposed solutions. To be sure, much of her advice is straightforward and practical - "Be careful not to say hateful things you will later regret" is unobjectionable enough. Yet she also advises that, in the face of the chaos of divorce, adult children need to recall their autonomy, to dictate the boundaries and terms of relationship between themselves and their families - and here one begins to see the problem emerge, even as one can simultaneously grant a provisional, occasional sense of truth to this.

To be sure, Foster tries to avoid explicit ideological claims about marriage and family in her book, presumably because she wishes to resonate with the largest possible audience and because one cannot refute personal experience. It would be wrong, therefore, to claim that Foster's work is ideologically-driven. Yet precisely because she never attempts to move beyond a "surface" experiential account to the heart of things, her work is permeated by a largely unexamined liberal-secular vision of the human person, marriage, and family. Claims that she takes for granted - e.g. that marriage is predicated on the spouses' happiness and right to fulfillment, or that divorced parents will take up new sexual relationships as a matter-of-course, or that the marital-familial bond is essentially contractual - rely on this anthropology. Readers that do not share the same assumptions will notice the dissonance and become alienated from the text.

It is important to read a book for what it is, rather than for what it is not. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even a religious horizon is virtually absent from this book, much less a distinctively Christian or Catholic one. Foster's otherwise rich account of the concrete experience of divorce suffers from this omission. Did your parents' divorce cause a crisis of faith? Did you find it difficult to pray? Were your parents religious? Did their divorce scandalize your church? These are fundamental facets of the experience of divorce for vast numbers of people, and they are eminently worthy of discussion, yet left completely unaddressed by Foster. The problems grow deeper upon moving to the explicitly Christian, where such fundamental categories as repentance, forgiveness, sacrificial love, vicarious suffering, and total self-gift in the form of a permanent vow must radically qualify all of Foster's advice and analysis.

The Way They Were is helpful as a sobering portrait of the concrete destructive power

of divorce, and as a gauge of the contemporary culture's attitudes on marriage and family. Its fundamental claim - that divorce damages adult children too - is eminently worthy of attention. The book may also bring some comfort to adults suffering through their parents' divorce, encountering in the book others like themselves. But owing to the book's implicit liberal-secular anthropology and its neglect of the religious horizon of human experience, it will offer little insight or solace to those for whom religion is a fundamental axis of life, especially Christians who view the reality of marriage and family as intrinsically ordered toward a culture of life and a civilization of love.

The Good Divorce

CATHERINE SIENKIEWICZ

Ahrons, Constance , *The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together When Your Marriage Comes Apart* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

Divorce isn't good per se, but it is better than a bad marriage. This is the premise of the book by Constance Ahrons which seeks to put divorce in a new and pleasanter light.

Ahrons wages a war on words. Much of the damage inflicted upon children of divorce, says Ahrons, is due to the language and attitudes surrounding it. Therefore we should not talk of broken homes, but of "binuclear" homes. Divorce language should embrace the new reality, not be rooted in the old. Continuing to cling to an ideal of a nuclear family with one mother and father, says Ahrons, only serves to deny reality and causes immeasurable harm to children of divorce; it is antiwomen, antimen, and antifamily (p. 10). A binuclear family simply spreads the original family between two homes, each managed by one "uncoupled exspouse."

Ahrons aims to shatter all of the standard conceptions about divorce and its fallout. Primary among them is the belief that divorce damages children in a variety of ways. It's not the divorce that causes the problems, argues the author, but the bad marriage which the divorce is ending. If the exspouses progress through the stages of divorce in a healthy and mature way, the children will emerge intact and will, in fact, be better off. It is deeply ingrained in our society that only in a nuclear family can we raise healthy children. Ahrons seeks to discredit that claim, with new and positive language for divorce, with new rituals to approach divorce and all its stages, and with an acceptance of divorce as a normal, healthy way to end a marriage that has failed.

And so, for much of the book, Ahrons supplies the reader with an analysis of the stages of divorce, from the initial decision to the legal endpoint. Through the anecdotal evidence of her case studies, one cannot help but question the conclusions she has neatly derived from them. They invite the reader to ask the deeper questions which the book does not raise. Central to any discussion of marriage, and therefore of

divorce, is an understanding of married love and the marriage vows which ground it. Ahrons's clients talk of falling in and out of love, of love failing. One gathers that married love is a feeling, outside of our control. (Yet if it is so ephemeral, why is there consistently shock and anger when it is revealed that the feeling has "gone?") Once it has gone, the marriage has failed. Though feelings seem to be paramount, apparently one mustn't be concerned with the feelings of the spouse who did not initiate the divorce - in no-fault divorce, only the feelings of the divorce-seeking spouse carry any weight.

If changing feelings are sufficient grounds to end a marriage, what worth can a marriage vow possibly have? The reality that - in spite of high divorce rates - many people still do marry (and remarry) signifies that there is a strength and a form to the vow, in which the spouses promise not to feel but to behave in a certain way towards each other. There is profound irony in the action, which Ahrons describes, of the vow-reversal ceremony which some divorced spouses perform, where the vow to honor and cherish is replaced by the vow to forgive and release. Somehow the persons are to take comfort in a vow originating from the same person who rendered a lifelong vow temporary and meaningless.

One of the strengths of Ahrons's book is the continual and emphatic priority she places on the children of the divorce as deserving of utmost consideration, even above the temporary feelings and concerns of the spouses. She consistently emphasizes, using examples from her client histories, that the spouses should not allow their understandable anger, pain, and loss to determine the terms of their post-divorce relationship. She seems optimistic about the amicability and personal growth that result from sacrificing one's own feelings to a higher purpose. The reader might be led, inadvertently, to wonder how such a selfless concern, both for the children and the other spouse, might have saved the marriage itself. But unfortunately one theme of the book is that the decision to divorce should be virtually free from critique or retrospection. We have no way of knowing how things might have been if the divorced couples she studied had stayed together. But there are studies on couples who were on the brink of divorce, yet remained committed to the marriage - these overwhelmingly show that the marriages improved, often drastically, through conflict and perseverance. The children of those marriages also tell a very different story from even the best divorces.

Ahrons makes the case that divorce in itself does not cause emotional and psychological wounds; that a good divorce can be a very healthy experience for the children involved. When addressing the myriad blended family arrangements in

which children of divorce find themselves, she seems confident of the adaptability of children, and does not mention the documented risks such children are often in, physically, emotionally, and sexually.

In what she seems to view as an exoneration of her own divorce, Ahrons ends the book with an essay written by her grown daughter, describing her life after her parents separated. Her daughter considers it a benefit that she had to become independent at a young age, and was exposed to many situations and experiences, as well as to the different lifestyles of her divorced parents. Even if we could agree that these are desirable experiences for children, it is amazing that Ahrons does not take account of her daughter's emphatic statement that she would "never wish it on anyone" and hopes "never to experience it personally." Could it perhaps be true that divorce creates a loss, the magnitude of which cannot be measured or quantified? Perhaps it is also true that one can add up every laudable effort to make the best of a bad situation, and the sum total will still never be "good."

Marriage-Go-Round

DANIEL MEOLA

Cherlin, Andrew J., *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (Vintage Books, 2010, 271 pages).

Andrew J. Cherlin, professor of sociology and public policy at Johns Hopkins University, wants to know: Why do Americans still marry when they fail constantly at marriage? This question is responding to the doleful reality that approximately one out of every two American marriages today end in divorce, the highest rate of divorce in the world. Yet equally astonishing, 90% of Americans are projected to marry in their lifetime, one of the highest marriage rates in the world. Given the coincidence of these facts, along with the fact that cohabiting relationships end more quickly in America than elsewhere, Cherlin argues that what is most distinctive and unique about American relationships is their transiency. America holds the dishonorable mention of the most frequent relationship transitions worldwide; hence the title of Cherlin's book: *The Marriage-Go-Round*.

What causes "marry-go-rounding"? Is it a desire for something more and better, what Cherlin calls the "M-Factor"? Or is there something unique about American culture that idealizes both marriage and divorce? Cherlin thinks it is both. Based on historical research, comparative studies with other countries, and an analysis of other sociological data, Cherlin argues that religion and law are the primary causes of America's simultaneous idealization of marriage and ready acceptance of divorce. The "M-Factor" is mediated by these fundamental cultural influences. Both American religion and American law have traditional aspects, which encourage self-sacrifice and marriage, as well as individualistic elements, which (unintentionally, perhaps) foster divorce.

This may sound surprising, in view of Christianity's strong endorsement of marriage. Cherlin explains that the predominant Christian denomination in nascent America was Puritanism, which allowed divorce in cases of adultery and desertion. These exceptions differed from Catholic France or early Anglicanism in England, both of which prohibited divorce in every instance. (Even King Henry VIII never divorced, but

rather obtained annulments through the Church of England.) Because of these Puritan exceptions, divorce was always legal in the New England colonies and remained legal after the revolutionary war, whereas it only became legal in Britain in 1857 and in France in 1887 (excepting the short period of the French Revolution, which introduced the first "no-fault" divorce). Moreover, Puritanism emphasized one's individual relationship to God and salvation by faith alone, which formed the basis for the later flourishing of individualism in America. Hence the irony: the Puritans, while proclaiming the sacredness and importance of marriage, planted what Cherlin calls the "seed of divorce" on American soil. This coincidence of a strong emphasis on marriage as well as on individualism is what Cherlin says makes American relationships so volatile.

Cherlin recognizes that Puritanism and early legal acceptance of divorce did not lead directly to America's later laissez-faire relationship ethos without the involvement of other factors. For instance, he identifies the industrial revolution, the sexual revolution of the 60s, and further changes in American religion and law as contributors to the high turnover rate in marriage. However, he holds that while these and other factors contributed to the dissolution of American marriages, it would be more accurate to say they exacerbated the religious and legal customs that were incipient at the beginning. The net effect of all these factors in America is that today marriage is not seen as the foundation of adult life, but as an "optional lifestyle," which one can choose to enter and leave at one's individual discretion.

Indeed, Cherlin asserts that marriage today represents the capstone of a successful life. Instead of preceding financial stability, a successful career, a home and children, marriage now comes after these goals and represents their apex. Consequently, marriage has retained its appeal because it represents a status or an achievement. However, the reduction of marriage to a status means that it is unclear what marriage "does" for an individual. Not being needed for other goals, marriage seems to have become not only a status, but an empty status.

The "marriage-go-round" has caused a lack of stability for many families. Cherlin's solution to this instability, especially for couples with children (the most vulnerable to instability), is not to "get married" but to "slow down." In fact, Cherlin's take-away advice for individuals is to discern more slowly if a person would be suitable as a cohabitation or marriage partner. Unfortunately, Cherlin's solution disregards the objective difference between marriage and cohabitation in favor of an emphasis on stability in relationships. While he does indicate that in practice cohabitation is more

volatile than marriage, he also posits that cohabitation could in theory be as stable as marriage (given the right conditions).

But is it true that marriage is the same as cohabitation? Also, would the promotion of stability outside marriage help to create more stable homes, or just repeat the same patterns that apply to marriage? That is, can a focus on stability alone, without any other criterion, really safeguard relationships from dissolving? Could not someone argue that he is leaving one relationship for a potentially more stable one? What will prevent a desire for stability from becoming the new excuse for abandoning a relationship?

To understand the objective difference between marriage and cohabitation and to develop a proper concept of stability as intrinsically tied to marriage, one has to ask if the essence of marriage is a social construction or if it is an order rooted in human nature. Cherlin indeed asks this fundamental question, opting for the "social construction" model because he equates nature simply with genetics. Marriage isn't "natural" because it's not in our genes, he says. But the reduction of nature to genes is arguable both scientifically and philosophically. Scientifically, systems biology has shown that "nature" involves a complex reciprocal interaction between the genes and the environment. Philosophically, in the Catholic tradition, DNA can be considered as the first ontological consequence of the soul informing a body from within. In this view, genes are expressive of a prior natural order within a person's body, the order of the soul. Part of this natural order - inscribed in our very masculinity and femininity - is a call to communion in marriage. This order of the soul-informed body is then meant to be taken up into man's freedom, helping us to see that marriage is rooted both in human nature and in freedom. One does not have to choose between nature and human freedom (social construction) as Cherlin does, but can have them both.

If it is true that marriage is grounded in our embodied nature and freedom, love by its very nature has an objective telos that couples enter into and don't merely determine on their own. Consequently, marriage as the institution that embodies objective love objectively transcends the couple's intentions of love and provides standards for them. Given its transcendence and objective form, marriage is different from cohabitation regardless of the flawed cultural instantiations of marriage that may make it look like cohabitation. Perhaps it is this particular type of stability, represented by a proper vision of marriage, which is neither practiced nor understood by many couples and social scientists (who see marriage as a mere product of society), that can save the notion of "stability" from being empty, or even from serving as an alibi for leaving a relationship. If this is correct, then we should understand the particular kind of bond

constituted by marriage as the sine qua non of stability.

While Cherlin's advice to discern and to enter relationships slowly should not be gainsaid, nonetheless it is insufficient and ambiguous for dealing with the cultural problem of the "marriage-go-round." The great achievements of *The Marriage-Go-Round* are its historical analysis of the root of the problems with marriage today in the beginning of America, its comparative study with Britain and France, and its chilling diagnosis of what marriage has become for vast numbers of people.

Nonetheless, Cherlin's solution is fundamentally flawed because couples need not only to discern and enter relationships slowly, but to know what type of relationship they ought to be discerning and entering into. Indeed, given that Cherlin recognizes the Puritans' influence on America's cultural problems in relationships, it is surprising that he does not consider the meaning of marriage as crucial for remedying the pernicious individualism that fuels the "marry-go-round."

In the end, only by contemplating what marriage is in its full truth will one perhaps be able to understand that the deepest answer to the question "Why do Americans still get married?" is the truth of love grounded in human nature and freedom. If this is true, while Cherlin says "slow down," and others say "get married," the best advice is: "discover the beauty of marriage."

Justifying the Bizarre

JENNIFER WIDHALM

Figes, Kate , *Couples: The Truth* (Virago Press, 2010, 406 pages).

English author Kate Figes's book, *Couples: The Truth*, is, to borrow a British term, rubbish. Purportedly an academic work investigating the state of modern relationships through personal interviews and research, Figes writes in a rambling, repetitive stream of consciousness, peppered with often vulgar slang (even aside from direct quotes of her interviewees), convoluted run-on sentences and terrible grammar. The connection between successive statements and paragraphs is frequently baffling. She states opinions as facts and makes sweeping assumptions about the very people and institutions she has failed to represent among her interviewees - married couples happily living "traditional gender roles" and taking their vows seriously. To attempt a thorough critique of all the logical fallacies, bad writing, non-sequiturs, and contradictions would require a book even longer. A brief look at one of her main muddles must suffice.

The denial of the objective structure of reality, beginning with human love, is Figes' great error and the key weakness of her book. Within the following apparently unconnected sentences, Figes states her foundational belief. "What is missing from the modern cultural emphasis on rampant individualism is the deep need for shared lives, for strong links to each other in order to be happy. A good intimate relationship brings about self-discovery rather than self-sacrifice. Unless we look after those closest to us we are destined to be unlooked-after and alone" (p. 4, emphasis added). Figes regards love as a quest for personal fulfillment not requiring the gift of self. There is nothing cruciform in her notion of love. This subjective view of love informs her positions on marriage, family structure, fidelity, and gender relations. For Figes, these can (and should) change according to shifting cultural trends and individual whims. This error forces her into innumerable contradictions.

Figes regards no-fault divorce as a "essential human right in a civilized world" (p. 229), one of our "most precious" rights (p. 262). Now that people live so much longer, she reasons, marriage until death is simply not practical. But this is irrational; increased

difficulty through changing circumstances does not nullify an objective truth, if indeed it is true. Figes, however, dismisses the claim that marriage cannot be dissolved before death as an "age-old religious assumption" (p. 262).

Nonetheless she is torn. Forced to admit that divorce produces misery and shame, she must also claim that it can be "liberating and life-enhancing." Forced to admit that divorce wounds children deeply, she also insists that they can be better off for it and that its negative effects on them can be minimized. Their parents must simply be mature enough to have a nice divorce. "[A]ll of the evidence suggests that the more resilient parents are, accepting the end of their partnership quickly and with good grace, focusing together on their shared roles as parents rather than hurling resentment, blame and rage at each other, the more resilient and undamaged their beloved children will be. When parents adapt and move on, so too do their children..." (p. 237). Yet she acknowledges statistics that divorce is the second most stressful life event (after the death of a spouse), increasing the risk of death, disease, smoking, alcohol abuse, and depression (p. 230). And she cites research by a psychologist that has found up to 25% of couples still bitterly fighting six years after their divorce (p. 248).

She also recognizes that the most important foundation for a child's well-being is the relationship between his parents (p. 283). If the "nice" divorce rarely happens and if spouses themselves are so devastated by it, how are they supposed to give their children "exactly the same stable base" and "a great deal more care, love, and emotional support" than when they were together (p. 246)? Incredibly, the personal testimony of grown children of divorce who described themselves as "permanently scarred" by the experience is discounted. In her study, the aforementioned psychologist did not find them to be "objectively" scarred since they appeared to function comparably to their peers from non-divorced homes (p. 239).

Herself a child of divorce at the age of five, Figes spent the first ten years of her marriage asking her husband, "you won't leave me, will you?" While she admits that children of divorce have difficulty trusting in love, she blames this on the inflated romanticism of modern notions of love rather than on divorce itself. She ends the chapter on divorce with the baffling observation that parents can provide their children with "brighter rays of hope when it comes to forming their own relationships... and the knowledge that love is about so much more than romance" (p. 271). Chalk "until death do us part" up to an overly-romanticized aspect of married love. For Figes, whatever else love is about, it is not permanence. "Love for a child has

to be unconditional; love between two consenting adults has to be symmetrical and is always conditional on our behavior" (p. 375). How can children trust that their parents' love for them will not fail if their love for each other - the love which brought the child into the world, constituting its identity and home - is conditional?

Children would benefit infinitely more from seeing their parents persevere through better or worse, as they promised they would. That is a lesson in the virtues of loyalty, integrity, and faithfulness. But Figs has little regard for these virtues, calling "for better or worse" a platitude (p. 13), and going so far as to state, "There is nothing inherently virtuous any more in people sticking together because of the principle of 'Til [sic] death do us part' when they would be happier alone or with someone else" (p. 19). Passing over the illogic of implying that living according to this principle used to be inherently virtuous, Figs would teach children that if they think they will be happier breaking a promise, they have a right to do it. Again, love is about "self-discovery" not self-sacrifice. "Your partner should never be more important to you than your relationship with yourself" (p. 364).

Figs also appears confused about whether or not children need both parents (a mother and a father). Her assertion that the quality of a child's relationship with his parents influences his happiness more than the number of parents present (p. 239) contradicts her admission that for each child, losing daily contact with a parent is a "life-changing tragedy" (p. 249). She claims that there is "overwhelming evidence" that the way a family functions matters more than its structure for a child's well-being (p. 230). Apparently she has not considered the fact that function follows structure (action follows being). A car with a flat tire will not perform like a car with four good tires, even after you put on the spare.

In the end, the great web of insanity caused by the refusal to acknowledge objective truth is perhaps best evidenced by the author's attempt to normalize the bizarre behaviors of many of the couples she interviewed. One couple, "Robin and Hilary," after years of marriage, mutually decided that Hilary could pursue regular "no strings attached" sexual relationships, starting with a young lodger in their home. Figs lauds "Hilary" as "enviously happy and sensual." Another couple, "Lawrence and Jane," practice polyamory. They have an open sexual relationship, currently swapping partners every other night with another couple (pp. 220-21). Figs opines that sexual fidelity has acquired a "sanctimonious moral importance" (pp. 36, 201) and concludes that although most couples still value monogamy, "it is by no means the only way" (p. 219).

If monogamy and indissolubility are not intrinsic to marriage, what is? For the author, nothing. Marriage must be redefined to include any type of "committed" relationship (however the participants define that commitment). But if "marriage" can be anything, then in the end, it is no-thing. And that, apparently, is okay with Kate Figs.

Intimate Relationships

ANDREW J. SODERGRÉN

Miller, Rowland S. & Perlman, Daniel, *Intimate Relationships*, 5th Edition (McGraw Hill, 2009).

Echoing the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II offered both warm praise and stern warnings about modern psychology on several occasions. He saw the great value of modern psychological science in contributing to man's self-understanding and helping to alleviate human suffering. However, he also warned of accepting psychological theory without thoroughly investigating it from the standpoint of Catholic anthropology. Failure to do so can result in people being led away from the Truth and into greater confusion about who man is and how he is to live. Yet, the Pope taught that bringing psychological science and Catholic anthropology together can result in a "complete and thus realistic vision of humans."

One of the most exciting contributions of psychology in recent decades is the scientific study of human relationships. Starting with such pioneers as Harry Harlow and John Bowlby, psychologists have undertaken countless systematic studies of how various relational experiences affect the parties involved, the qualities and factors that promote healthy relationships, and those that lead to deteriorating ones. Miller and Perlman's *Intimate Relationships* represents a useful, current synthesis of the portion of this research dealing with adults.

Miller and Perlman emphasize that human beings have a basic need to belong. They argue that we are a social species, and individuals and communities are more likely to flourish in the presence of close, meaningful relationships. They show on the basis of scientific research that human beings handle stress better, are physically healthier, and emotionally happier when they are supported by trusted friends and/or a loving romantic partner. They similarly show how social rejection, loneliness, and shyness can wound us in all of these areas. Indeed, being rejected or rebuffed by important people seems to activate some of the same circuitry in the brain related to physical pain. Broken relationships hurt! Similarly, people who are lonely or isolated tend to have higher blood pressure, more stress hormones circulating in their blood, and

poorer functioning immune systems. All of this brings to light once again the word of God in the book of Genesis: It is not good for man to be alone (cf. Gen 2:17).

These findings are especially disconcerting in light of certain cultural trends. The rise in divorce rates is well known. What is less well known is that despite being in the age of social media, research cited by Miller and Perlman suggests that, as a society, we are becoming less, not more, intimately connected with others. Data from a nationally representative sample show that the percentage of American adults who report having no close confidant of any sort more than doubled from 10 percent in 1985 to 25 percent in 2004. During that same time period the average number of intimate relationships reported by American adults decreased from three to two. It seems that all the technology at our fingertips is not much help in satisfying the need for love.

When committed, intimate relationships break up, people suffer as a result. There is no clearer example of this than divorce, which the research suggests is a major setback for all involved. While the initiating spouse may feel some relief as he/she escapes from an unhappy relationship, average well-being scores after a divorce never reach the levels they were before the trouble began. In general, both spouses tend to suffer in significant ways, though to varying degrees, in many areas of life after a divorce. Even more, the children of divorce clearly lose out. Here Miller and Perlman are quite clear: "The verdict is in. Decades of research involving hundreds of thousands of people converge on the conclusion that, compared to those whose parents stay married, children whose parents divorce exhibit lower levels of well-being both as adolescents and as young adults" (p. 415). They go on to discuss these detrimental effects on emotional well-being, behavior, academic performance, and future relationships.

Miller and Perlman's book is also helpful in pointing out research-supported ways we can strengthen our close relationships. In addition to carrying positive yet realistic expectations of our relationships and engaging in attuned, empathic communication, they mention such admirable qualities as being willing to make sacrifices, supporting each other's personal growth, patiently tolerating each other's bad moods, finding ways to be playful together, and practicing forgiveness when we are hurt. When our marriages or intimate partnerships become especially strained, Miller and Perlman encourage their readers to consider therapy, providing helpful descriptions of several of the leading styles of marital therapy and offering some guidance on how to find a competent provider.

Despite all the interesting findings from relationship science presented by these

authors, there are some significant problems with their text as well. First, they tend to minimize the differences between men and women, attributing the majority of such differences to unhealthy cultural values. There is also a strong bias that recurs throughout the book equating same-sex couples with heterosexual couples. Miller and Perlman selectively present research findings to support the equality of these two types of relationships and also try to argue from the authority of the scientific community for social change in this regard. Former president of the American Psychological Association Martin Seligman has characterized the role of the social scientist as one of describing not prescribing. Miller and Perlman seem to have no difficulty occasionally straying from this dictum, lapsing into advocacy and sometimes even directly trying to change their reader's behavior, as if being a scientist conferred moral authority. One area in which this occurs is their frequent repetition in the text of the "safe sex" mantra. These authors deny the effectiveness of abstinence education and fail to adequately address the moral and cultural value of chastity. Rather they repeat again and again the need to use condoms. Apparently they are unconcerned for how such a recommendation may affect readers who hold religious or moral beliefs that contradict their directives.

Like so much of what is found in the contemporary psychological literature, there is much of value in *Intimate Relationships*. The research findings are at times fascinating, curious, and challenging. Miller and Perlman's presentation is engaging and readable helping to make what could be dry details more lively. One cannot come away from reading this book without feeling a little stronger in self-knowledge and wiser regarding what makes relationships succeed or fail. Nonetheless, as John Paul II warned, one has to sift the good from the bad in order to unite the truths of science with the truths of faith. This is a delicate task that sometimes requires a deeper investigation into the research literature than can be conveyed in a textbook like *Intimate Relationships* and a thoughtful analysis of the researchers' presuppositions. Thus, in the end, the well-prepared reader will find harmonies of Truth in Miller and Perlman's work while the novice may need assistance to keep from straying off key.

In Spite of Everything

LAUREN PATTERSON

Thomas, Susan Gregory , *In Spite of Everything: A Memoir* (Random House, 2011, 208 pages).

"The human family, disunited by sin, is reconstituted in its unity by the redemptive power of the death and Resurrection of Christ. Christian marriage, by participating in the salvific efficacy of this event, constitutes the natural setting in which the human person is introduced into the great family of the Church. The commandment to grow and multiply, given to man and woman in the beginning, in this way reaches its whole truth and full realization. The Church thus finds in the family, born from the sacrament, the cradle and the setting in which she can enter the human generations, and where these in their turn can enter the Church" (Familiaris Consortio 15).

The Church's vision for the family brings with it a serious mission. In the contemporary culture, an epidemic of divorce has cast a dark shadow on this mission and threatens the upbringing of children capable of entering into and fostering loving relationships that will bear fruit in the life of the Church and society.

Susan Gregory Thomas's memoir, *In Spite of Everything*, is both the personal account of the life of a child of divorce in contemporary America as well as an analysis of her generation X's collective experience as the children of failed marriages and negligent parenting during this same cultural period. Written from a personal lens steeped in American pop culture with a sometimes caustic humor and self-deprecating tone, *In Spite of Everything* offers some nevertheless important and insightful windows into the increasingly more common task facing children today: making sense of their own identity and call to love in light of a broken origin.

Thomas speaks of her upbringing in the height of the well-known "latch-key kid" era. The result, she claims, is a generation of adult children whose dominant childhood experiences are those of alienation, fear, and isolation, having been left largely to parent themselves. Thomas attributes her generation's wild devotion to Star Wars, as well as much of 1980s pop music, to a deep sense of identification with being alone in

the world. She cites studies that lend credence to the notion that her generation's attitudes toward marriage, family, and parenting have been largely shaped by the root experience of abandonment. Her observations - often set against the stereotypes of the preceding "Baby Boomer" generation - raise important points about the effect of divorce and parental attentiveness (or lack thereof) on children, and the difficulty that arises when one seeks life-giving adult relationships, requiring the ability to donate oneself in love and trust, while the foundation of love has not been adequately established by one's family of origin.

This analysis is woven throughout Thomas's own story. She has suffered the wounds of divorce and emotional abuse and neglect of an alcoholic, Jekyll-and-Hyde-like father (whose infidelity and drinking led to the collapse of two subsequent marriages). She is left deeply wounded by his abandonment at the tender age of twelve, a particularly delicate age for girls, and draws poignantly on the image of the Greek maiden left alone in the field to describe the loss of her virginity the following year to a much-older family friend whose intentions she mistook for big-brotherly affection until she found herself, overwhelmed, unable to escape his advances. Thus begins her teenage downward spiral. As Thomas narrates the journey through her adolescent, college, and young-adult years into her marriage, it becomes clear that the unwieldy task of making sense of herself and her world has been left solely to this young woman and the cues she can glean from the culture around her, and her wounds are many.

For Thomas, facing the world alone brings deep, existential distress. This is a recurring theme in the book: experiences of "alone" versus "not alone" in the world. Having been failed by her family in receiving a sense of being with, some relief comes for Thomas in finding her future spouse, in his calm and confidence, his intact family background, and his enduring presence with her. Hence the pain the reader experiences through her eyes when, in spite of everything, she finds herself unable to sustain their subsequent marriage only eight years in. Having to explain to her two young daughters why she is unable to shield them from the very thing she most wanted to avoid, knowing its pain so deeply herself, is perhaps the most painful aspect for Thomas. She attributes her marriage's failure to a misplaced search for the protection and safety she sought in a father, having never recovered the sense of security necessary for the true unfolding of her "self" during her formative years, thus making trust and vulnerability in courtship virtually impossible. Essentially, Thomas believes that she was looking for a father in a husband. To this I would add: Thomas' described personal weaknesses, evidences of the impact of divorce, coupled with the failure of society's presentation of marriage to act as a "safety net" when the family failed at its

task of personal formation, are to blame. Thomas was twice failed: once by her family and a second time by society at large. A deeper cultural corrective is needed if the epidemic of divorce is to be healed.

The book's thematic juxtaposition of being "alone" and "not alone" - "alone" bringing with it deep-seated fear and "nihilistic dread" - reveals in a profound way the need of every human person to be born into a context of love, a stable home in which Love can be revealed and received as the very meaning of one's being. There is an interesting dance with the idea of an encounter with God through *lectio divina* ("holy reading") that surfaces in Thomas's telling, a theme that clearly adds depth to the question of being alone in the world. But it ends up reflecting another sickness of the contemporary culture: the inability to bring personal experience into dialogue with the larger whole. Her commentary on her peers' attitudes toward religion betrays her embrace of similar presuppositions: that religion must be relegated to the sphere of "personal experience," that religious traditions can and should be evaluated on the basis of "personal connection," that one can craft whatever self-referential spiritual framework one might find beneficial in a certain time and circumstance without regard to tradition or objective truth. These implicit biases prevent her experiences from speaking more powerfully, and shedding light on the meaning of marriage as having a divine Source and destiny.

The strength of the book is that the author reveals throughout a deep sense of the necessity of the family's establishing a safe and loving context in which children learn that they are not alone, and demonstrates just how damaging the decision of her parents' generation to embrace marital dissolution without regard to its impact on their children has been. She is resolved never to present divorce as even a relative good - she is quite clear that, for her and her peers, divorce was an event catastrophic to the heart and psyche.

Though a deeper cultural corrective is needed, one that critiques from the roots the contemporary presentation of marriage and its underlying assumptions about love, freedom, suffering, self-giving, and the human person, and the role of these in bringing about the cultural epidemic of divorce, Thomas's insight into her experience as an adult child of divorce struggling to forge a loving and stable home is helpful, one that might speak to others in a similar situation, and that also helps to show how the epidemic perpetuates itself. Thomas explores the nature of marriage, but her questioning of the roles of men and women, the relationship between spouses, and the role of the home in the identity of the family, though significant for Thomas herself, do little more than ripple the surface of the typical secular-feminist ideology which

she has embraced, seeing marriage as a partnership on which spouses must retain even footing and which is sustained by the mutual agreement of the parties until one or both decide otherwise.

Nevertheless, the questions she raises do highlight a certain openness within the culture to receive the life-giving perspective of the Theology of the Body, revealing the areas of weakness that the cultural mindset bears when put to the test of life in the family. Thomas seems to desire a deeper sense of masculinity and femininity, a sense of unity and deep personal identity that comes from being wedded as "husband and wife" rather than simply "partners," and the freedom to be indissolubly bound to a role with an objective and transcendent meaning. In the end, Thomas shies away from any wholesale embrace of any conclusion on the nature of marriage, simply leaving the reader with an epilogue in which we meet a new lover and discover that Thomas is expecting his child.

Reading *In Spite of Everything* was difficult on a human level. Entering into this woman's story, I felt deeply the pains she described in a very raw and personal manner, and empathized with her as she articulated a deep desire for union, for stability, and for a good and solid grounding for her daughters. The reader is taken on a journey through coming-of-age, marriage, parenthood, and divorce filled with psychological turmoil that I found difficult and heart-rending to read. Potential readers should also beware: in addition to ample pop-cultural references, profanity surfaces throughout, as does the occasional use of the Lord's name in vain.

Though I would not necessarily recommend Thomas's memoir to a broad theological, philosophical and academic audience - its subject matter is narrow and tone casual - I would propose it as a potentially interesting and helpful work for those more specifically interested in the unique experiences of children of divorce, as well as those interested in a close critique of the contemporary culture and/or in the analysis of recent American popular culture and the attitudes of the Baby Boomer generation and/or Generation X.

Fractured Generations

MICHAEL CAMACHO

Carlson, Allan , *Fractured Generations: Crafting a Family Policy for Twenty-First-Century America* (Transaction Publishers, 2005).

What becomes of the family when there is nothing concrete left to bind together husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister, save for emotion or companionship? What happens to a family when each member departs for the greater part of the day for his or her own job, schooling or childcare, coming back together only in the evening, with the result that any common life that exists between the members revolves primarily around shared leisure activities or, more rarely, a shared meal? How can such a family be united without a common mission, a transmission of tradition and culture through the incarnate realities of work, learning and caring, activities which must take place in that specific and shared time and place which we call a home? What, in other words, is the fate of the modern "functionless family"?

This, I would argue, is the overriding question that emerges from Allan Carlson's *Fractured Generations*. Begun as a series of lectures on "Family Policy," the book deals with the history of marriage and family, primarily in twentieth-century America, especially through the lens of changing public policy. Specifically, the various chapters treat the issues of population policy, childcare, schooling, suburbia, tax policy, the home economy, and elderly care. While the book suffers somewhat from the lack of an overarching, comprehensive argument regarding changes in family policy, an underlying unity shines through as one continues to make one's way through the work. In particular, it becomes clear that Carlson sees the chief problem as a continual loss of the specific functions of the family to either the welfare state or to big business (which often work together in conjunction with one another), a loss which is particularly grievous when it comes to tasks dealing specifically with persons: care for the young and the elderly and the schooling of children most especially.

Carlson contrasts today's functionless family with the family as it existed throughout most of the history of the world, including nineteenth-century America, when ninety percent of the populace worked small family farms and most of the other ten percent

worked as artisans or craftsmen. In such an economic situation, most tasks occurred within the household and local community: the growth and preparation of food; the making of clothing; the construction and maintenance of shelter; education, such as it was; basic health care, etc. Husband and wife both worked in and around the home, as did the children, specializing in various ways and yet working together toward a common goal. This situation changed, of course, with the advent of the industrial revolution: not only were various family tasks siphoned off to the factory, but the labor of the family as a whole was divided, with men, women, and children pulled apart and put to work in different factories based upon their different aptitudes. Carlson cites an early feminist author in this connection, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who wrote that, even in 1899, the tasks of the once productive family had been reduced to only three: cooking, cleaning, and early childcare. Tellingly, Gilman saw no reason why even these three functions could not also be industrialized: and, arguably, that is exactly what has occurred.

The development of industrial capitalism also makes it no longer economically beneficial to have children: according to Gary Becker and the Chicago School, current fertility rates have declined as the "price" of children, including the "market value" of the time spent on each child, has risen, while the economic benefits children provide in terms of labor has dropped. Carlson notes, however, that this account is not quite accurate, since fertility rates did not begin to decline immediately coincident with the rise of industrial capitalism. Rather, Carlson argues, together with John Caldwell, that fertility declined with a change in schooling: according to statistics, "Each additional month that rural children spent in school decreased family size in that district by 23 children." What could explain this connection between increased education and decreased fertility? The answer, Carlson surmises, is that through mass public education new inimical ideas about the family were introduced.

Indeed, throughout the book as a whole Carlson makes the larger point that it is not material conditions but ideological ones that account for the damage the American family has sustained in terms of declining births in children, fewer marriages, rising divorce, etc. It is right and important, I think, that Carlson recognizes the underlying cause as a change in how we understand reality. The book, in fact, makes clear in quite concrete ways the manner in which our self-proclaimed neutral government is in fact always "legislating morality," consciously or not, subtly shaping the ways in which we think about marriage, children, the home, and indeed freedom and morality itself. To take an extreme example, this is evident in the population policies put in place at the end of the Nixon era, codified especially in health care policy Title X, which

in response to neo-Malthusian fears, explicitly sought to create an "anti-natalist" mentality. It is evident in housing laws which either favor young married couples or elect not to do so, and which determined, through architecture and zoning, whether houses should operate on a "functional" model or a "companionship" model. It is evident in tax laws which at times have penalized married couples who file jointly, and which either directly reward or indirectly punish having children, through raising or lowering the personal exemption that can be claimed and the tax credits which are made available.

Unfortunately, Carlson to some extent follows a familiar and by now worn line in laying most of the responsibility for America's anti-family policies at the feet of an immoral elite, such as equity feminists, neo-Malthusians, sexual revolutionaries, and militant secularists. Carlson sets these thinkers against America's "natural religiosity" and the general normative strength of the family, which was simply taken for granted throughout most of our history. He argues, for example, that in the face of the industrial revolution and the consumerist individualism it induced, Americans still held onto the importance of the family despite strained economic circumstances. According to Carlson, there was a deliberate shift in the first part of the twentieth century to a breadwinner/homemaker model, in which women by custom and consent took part-time and lower paying jobs in order to be able to remain at home with their children, thus enabling the men to earn a higher "family wage" that could support the family as a whole. As Carlson paints it, then, gender inequality in the workplace during the middle part of the century was not simply a byproduct of a bigoted age, but was deliberately engaged in as a means of keeping some semblance of communal family life in the face of industrial capitalism.

Today, of course, it is commonplace for both parents to work outside the home and to try to care for their children simultaneously, and the author sees this as a grave problem for the waning strength of the American family. The modern-day solution is a childcare system which, according to the data, results in children with far more health issues and psychological problems. Carlson instead advocates the return, as much as possible, of both parents to the home, as an attempt to re-functionalize the family, through telecommuting, for example, or home offices or clinics. In particular, he sees homeschooling as an important first step in this direction, and notes that families who homeschool are vastly more likely to have only one parent working, enabling them to try their hand at vegetable gardening or even small animal husbandry. In keeping with the focus of the book, Carlson also advocates policy-level solutions, particularly in the area of tax policy: for example, reintroducing full

"income splitting" in the federal income tax, raising the level of the personal income-tax exemption for children (which historically has been shown to correlate with increased fertility), and giving tax credits for homeschooling education expenses and to families that choose to raise their young children at home (currently tax credits are given only for those who use day-care).

Fractured Generations provides much information on the history of the family and public policy that is stimulating and at times surprising. If there is a shortcoming to the book, it is that Carlson perhaps does not think deeply enough about the nature of American individualism and our peculiar "anti-natalism," attributing it too quickly to the ideas of the immoral elites mentioned above. In contrast, we should think, e.g. with David L. Schindler, about the way in which the very notions of liberty and the autonomy of the self, which are the grounds for the American political system, themselves betray a certain anti-childness.

Likewise, we need to recognize that change cannot simply occur, or occur first, at the policy level, but needs to begin with a change in heart and most especially in understanding of each person. (Carlson himself explicitly recognizes this fact when dealing with the issue of reforming public school policy.) While recognizing the focus of the book on public policy issues and the kind of limits such a focus implies, I would argue that the symptoms (e.g., falling fertility rates) and solutions (e.g., tax breaks) to the problems facing the family which Carlson puts forward need to be engaged at a much deeper cultural level. At the same time, as indicated above, the author does make clear through the statistics, history, and facts he provides the manner in which our overall cultural stance toward reality - the underlying metaphysics and theology implicit in our culture - is concretely manifest in a myriad of various ways.

Finally, I would want to push Carlson a bit further in his claim that industrialization, while representing a "misplaced quest for efficiency and profit" in services dealing with persons (e.g., child or elderly care), nonetheless "works miraculously well when the products are light bulbs and automobiles." Rather, I would argue that our current economic system instantiates a kind of instrumentalism in our economic dealings with things - which of course, incidentally, are always also dealings with persons - that both reflects and redounds upon the nature of persons, and particularly upon the nature of the family as a haven for the "useless" intrinsic goodness of persons as represented in children and the elderly. In this way, the reformation of something like an authentic family economy which Carlson calls for, in whatever specific form that might take, will have an impact far beyond the family, helping to reshape how it is that we understand both our relationship to the natural material world and our

relationship to others, both inside the family and beyond its bounds.

A Science of Happy Couples

JOHN LARACY

Parker-Pope, Tara, *For Better: How the Surprising Science of Happy Couples Can Help your Marriage Succeed* (Plum: 2010).

What is marriage, and how does it relate to human happiness? In order to work through marital difficulties - and to prevent them in the first place - spouses need to reflect on these basic questions. Tara Parker-Pope opens her acclaimed marital self-help book, *For Better*, with a different question: "What makes a good marriage?" In other words, what are the mechanics of marriage? Having struggled through divorce herself, Parker-Pope, a health columnist for the *New York Times*, turned to social science to see what went wrong. As the fruit of her extensive research into social statistics, surveys, and controlled experiments, the book aims to reveal the patterns of behavior that lead to divorce and offer suggestions for overturning these patterns.

Some of the most eye-opening research is presented in Chapter Six, titled "Diagnosing the Health of a Relationship," which seeks to uncover concrete predictors of divorce like facial expressions and ways of speaking. She tells us, for instance, that one group of lab researchers was able accurately to predict future marital unhappiness by analyzing couples' facial expressions during recorded conversations. Eye rolling, it turns out, is one of the best indicators of marital turmoil because it is an obvious sign of contempt. In another study, couples were asked to tell the story of how they met; couples who used the communal pronouns "we," "us," and "our" were less likely to get divorced than couples who told the tale as an individualistic "I." At first glance, such studies appear to be helpful, and to an extent they can be: frequent eye-rolling certainly can be a sign of contempt which must be remedied. Dwelling on them, however, can encourage a sense of doom: I roll my eyes at my wife, so we must be headed for divorce. Parker-Pope's focus on predicting divorce by looking at the mechanics of marriage may actually fuel anxiety over where one's marriage is headed.

Similarly, her use of statistics to highlight "divorce risk" implies the inevitability of divorce in some cases. Looking at divorce rates in the opening chapter, she notes an especially high divorce rate among college dropouts who married in the 1980s before

turning twenty-five. She thus concludes that "your divorce risk is strongly affected by the age at which you marry, your educational attainment, and the decade in which you married" (p. 14). This problematic sense of "divorce risk" falsely attributes a kind of causal power to the statistics. Any young married couple, genuinely in love and committed for life, need not fret about statistical risk. Based on the statistics, Parker-Pope would have us wait until we turn twenty-five to marry to improve our "odds" of staying married. But for a particular couple who make their marriage vows in earnest, divorce is simply not an option, and rightly so. Ironically, Parker-Pope goes on to cite research which states that merely pondering the thought of divorce is a strong predictor for divorce (p. 260), while her own use of the statistics forces the reader to do just that!

Obviously these statistics are not false or irrelevant, but they need to be understood in light of what marriage is. At no point does Parker-Pope explicitly raise this basic question, although she does recognize a cultural shift in how we view marriage. Unlike traditional marriage, marriage today is more a matter of forming a "friendship" or finding a "soul mate" than rearing children (p. 168). Although she notes that this sense of marriage may be "unrealistic," she presupposes all along that marriage is primarily for the happiness of the couple. Despite her intent to help others avoid divorce, she still considers divorce to be a necessary option for unhappy couples. In her chapter on sex within marriage, she writes, "Couples also need to consider the possibility that the lack of sex in marriage may be a signal that all intimacy in the relationship is over" (p. 88). She admits that divorce may be a better option than an "unfulfilling," sex-less marriage. But she never considers the possibility that a false, self-interested view of marriage and human happiness is responsible for our country's divorce problem in the first place. Citing countless surveys on marital "satisfaction" and "happiness," she never explores what happiness truly is.

In ignoring these basic questions, Parker-Pope fails to penetrate to the root causes of divorce. If she understood that human sexuality finds its meaning in the irrevocable commitment of marriage, she might have reflected more deeply on the fact that "infidelity rates are highest among couples who cohabit before marriage" (p. 38), rather than merely mentioning this fact in passing. If she understood that marital love is the fruitful giving and receiving of husband and wife, which finds its fulfillment in fatherhood and motherhood, she would not promote "gender equality" in marriage by highlighting the lack of conflict among gay and lesbian couples. Instead she might reflect more deeply on the study which shows that those marriages "marked by the male breadwinner/ female homemaker roles...had the lowest divorce

rate..." (p. 254). Parker-Pope's analysis of the "mechanics of marriage" in *For Better* is always colored by her mistaken view of marriage as a mere choice - as something constructed for one's own contentment. In promoting this view of marriage and legitimizing the option of divorce, she does more harm than good. A genuine marital self-help book - if such a thing exists - must begin with a proper understanding of marriage.

Divorce Culture

MICHAEL ROESCH

Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe, *Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family* (Vintage Books, 1996, 224 pages).

"Ideas are important in revolutions, yet surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the ideas that gave impetus to the divorce revolution" (pp. 3-4). Writing in the mid-1990s, about thirty years into the "divorce revolution," social historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead points out a fundamental change in society that, oddly enough, has largely been ignored. Divorce, it was promised, would free women caught in bad marriages... but what actually happened? Whitehead presents a strong critique of the popular culture's talking points on divorce, pointing out what actually led to the explosion in divorce rate in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the effects it has had on families, individual spouses, and children.

The focus of Whitehead's study is the change in what marriage and divorce mean for a couple, and how this change has affected the bonds between husband and wife, parents and children. Criticism of the American divorce rate in the public square almost invariably places the center of discussion on the legal shift to no-fault divorce. While an important part of the debate, especially because it effectively allowed one parent to unilaterally disrupt the other parent's relationship with his or her children, this legal change does not comprise the main theme in Whitehead's pages. Instead, she presents a full history of American divorce reflecting on the phenomenon from the nineteenth century onward, in terms not of its legal availability but rather of the predominant social circumstances surrounding divorce, and the reasons given for divorcing. A broader historical account (reminding the reader that divorce wasn't suddenly invented in the 1960s) enables her to explain the shift to what she terms "expressive divorce."

Whitehead places the rise of expressive divorce in the same cultural phase that saw a huge increase in the use of the therapy for the treatment of unhappiness rather than mental illness. In the first half of the twentieth century, the reasons people cited for divorce most commonly included economic hardship or the lack of financial support,

and society balked at the idea of divorcing one's spouse on the grounds of simple unhappiness. This changed after the Second World War, as people increasingly looked to the self for fulfillment. It was in this egocentric cultural milieu that divorce became a mode for self-expression and a tool for self-improvement. Especially for women, this new, expressive understanding of divorce meant a new capacity for taking control of one's own life. Whitehead's subjects talk of their newfound freedom and rebirth offered by divorce in almost sacramental terms (despite the fact that the prospect was not always for the better, as Whitehead shows, especially for poorer women and single mothers).

At the same time, institutions that had once been supportive of marriage were also caught up in the individualistic psychology of the age. Mainline ministers deferred to psychological methods when working with couples, and marriage counselors were trained to be neutral on the issue of divorce. Whitehead cites a therapist as saying, "We are in the business of saving individuals, not marriages" (p. 71). Perhaps most interestingly, Whitehead turns throughout the book to etiquette literature such as Emily Post to take the pulse of the culture's attitudes on divorce. Where in the first half of the century the etiquette literature represented divorce as a failure, and even reinforced the taboos on it while devising a proper way for divorced couples to behave and for others to behave toward them, by the 70s it was taken for granted as a societal norm and the focus was on how best to discuss it.

What Whitehead notes as missing from the thought of the culture during this drastic change in attitudes to divorce was the children. The prevailing thought at the beginning of the expressive divorce era was simply that children would be happier when they had happier parents, but it was abundantly clear by the time Whitehead was writing that this was not always the case. With a devastating array of statistics and anecdotal evidence, she argues for a re-centering of the divorce discussion around the party that is actually the most vulnerable: the child. She also spends some time discussing what she calls the "Love Family ideology" - a redefinition of family to de-emphasize the biological connection in favor of a voluntary bond or feeling. In this ideology, parenting becomes un-gendered (and, as she argues, therefore has an emphasis on the feminine) and other adult figures are expected to step into a child's life, so that the absence of a father is not seen as a real loss. Most important in her analysis is the reduction of fatherhood in many families to a court-mediated cultural model "symbolized by three documents: the birth certificate, the child support check, and the sentimental greeting card" (p. 171).

In her conclusion, Whitehead's prescriptions for the problem are somewhat modest. In addition to her constant advocacy for viewing the children as "key stakeholders in their parents' marriage" (p. 190), she most notably calls for an increased understanding that marriage is not just about one person, or even two or a family, but the entire society. She believes that the first step is educating the public to understand that easy divorce represents a failure for our culture. Her own work is a good place to begin. Her analysis provides a strikingly complete, if secular, survey of divorce. In fact, though it is in no way dated, despite the decade and a half since its publication, new questions have arisen that would prompt us to take her conclusions even further. While many of the children of divorce have grown up to provide further evidence for her conclusions, and a large number of them are committed never to make the same mistakes as their parents, a widespread lack of trust in the permanence of marriage now causes issues at the other end. Increasingly, couples cohabit before marriage, or even decide to forgo it completely. One also wonders to what extent the issues of gender, fatherhood, and motherhood could even be discussed today in a popular secular work, as Whitehead does. *Divorce Culture* is an important, accessible work, bringing light to bear on the devastation caused to families by divorce, but it is only a beginning in the task of re-assembling a culture of marriage.

An Ontological Wound

JULIANA WEBER

Root, Andrew, *The Children of Divorce* (Baker Academic, 2010, 139pp.).

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, divorce "introduces disorder into the family [...] brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, [and] to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them" (2385). The Catechism seems to assume the presence of trauma, but can this be avoided by an amicable divorce?

In this approachable and compassionate study aimed at a primarily Christian readership, Andrew Root argues that harm to the children is virtually inevitable, no matter how amicable the divorce. He draws on personal experiences (his own, his wife's, and that of other children of divorce through studies and interviews) for purposes of illustration. He is less concerned with blame, however, than with offering practical suggestions for churches to help the children of divorced parents to heal from this injury.

Root begins with a history of marriage and the family. The Enlightenment's overemphasis on the individual shifts the objective of marriage from that of shared property, shared power, shared labor and the like, to one of individual and subjective fulfillment. The family once provided "unquestioned purpose and meaning" (p. 14), a generational narrative into which (for better or worse) one was inserted by birth. By contrast, today "a child's belonging no longer rest[s] in the history of a lineage, but in the affection of individuals", that is, in the affection between father and mother (p. 19).

And if the affection between father and mother dissipates, where does the child go for a sense of belonging and meaning? The common experience of children of divorce is a feeling of being lost, of slipping into non-being. One must start over, writing for oneself a coherent, unified narrative of oneself in relation to the world. This is the experience of an "ontological wound" (p. 45). To put it another way, since our sense of being and security (confidence that the world, especially the social world, is as it appears to be) is rooted in our parents' relationship, divorce correspondingly leads to

ontological insecurity in the child.

Root emphasizes that this is no mere psychological or emotional injury. When parents' relatedness is disturbed by divorce, a child's very being is necessarily shaken. Borrowing from sources such as Heidegger and Barth for his metaphysics, Root proposes that, since beings exist only in particular places and related to the world in particular ways, one's being cannot remain the same when one's father moves out, for example, and leaves the family behind. Location and relationality are essential to being. The change in location and relation to the world, in the case of divorce, means only an irreplaceable loss of relatedness, a loss of being. This insight and his practical suggestions for healing the injury are the main strengths of the book.

Root argues that the objective of family, then, is not primarily to make children happy or self-fulfilled, but to provide them with the ontological security that comes with coherent relatedness to the world (p. 96). Who the child "is" cannot be coherent because his primary relations have become incoherent, even contradictory. In order to belong to each parent, the child needs (perhaps at scheduled times) to adopt one of two separate personae. Christmas gifts from one divorced parent cannot be paraded in front of the other, and the child is loath to act in a way that reminds one divorced parent of the other. The task of forging one world out of the parents' separated worlds has become the task of the child (pp. 78-83). Feelings of being "real" come from being encountered by the world, but the world has now been split into two incoherent realms, no longer able to reflect one whole identity back to the child.

Root's final chapter is one of concrete, practical suggestions for the youth minister, the friend, and the parent on how to ease the suffering of the child of divorce. In the best-case scenario, the child's sense of belonging will revolve around the church. An ecclesial community can keep us in touch with something holy, protecting us from despair; it can provide a place where we feel we belong, even if our family home has become problematic; it can show us compassion and assure us that we are not alone or invisible just because of our own problems; it can give some coherency and structure to our lives by means of rituals and customs; and in general it can help us find a new balance between autonomy and belonging.

Root gives attention to the deepest and most overlooked wound sustained by the children of divorce. He provides wide support for his explanation through theology, philosophy, the social sciences and practical experience. All of it is worth reading. The chapter of practical advice goes beyond the work of the average theoretical scholarship and speaks of a very kind heart. This is a book to recommend to everyone.

Between Two Worlds

LESLEY RICE

Marquardt, Elizabeth, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (Crown Publishers, 2005).

Philosopher Robert Spaemann has called the human person "an animal that can promise and forgive." In the free decision that is a promise, a person makes a commitment that signifies his transcendence over his passing wishes and gives form and stability to his relationships; this commitment is at once a bond and a generative élan. Marriage is a privileged - and today, endangered - form of promising. In response to a love that neither could have created, a man and a woman do create something new through their free exchange of vows. The order their promise establishes, and will have to confirm again and again, is what we call a home, the most basic place of human flourishing.

What becomes of a home, and the persons who are to flourish within it, when the promise that established it is abandoned?

This question is brought into focus by Elizabeth Marquardt's *Between Two Worlds*, which is based on the first nationally representative survey of young adults from divorced families. Herself a child of divorced parents, each of whom continued in separate ways to love and care for her, Marquardt's own experience made her skeptical of the "happy talk" of experts who accept and even contribute to the normalization of divorce, contenting themselves with suggesting paths to a "good divorce," if divorce you must. Her study, which balances personal interviews with analysis of survey data, focuses on best-case-scenario divorces-amicable separations in which the children maintained contact with both parents into adulthood-and concludes that any divorce radically restructures childhood. The intentions, efforts, even cooperation of the separating parents do not suffice to restore what is lost to their children when they give up on their marriage.

The strength of the book is Marquardt's strong sense that structures bear meaning: in particular, her conviction that marriage is an institution that transcends the will of

the spouses, and that children's development depends upon their parents' marriage (the very fact of it, quite apart from whether the spouses are satisfied with their relationship). The decision to marry, for her, is a decision to undertake the demanding and ongoing work of making one "world" out of the individual worlds of the two spouses. The work of forging the unity of a home, a hospitable space for the maturation of its inhabitants, is normally invisible to children, whose ability to explore and develop both within and outside of the home depends upon the stability and security of their parents' "united front." In divorce, the work of creating a unity of meaning in which a child can come to maturity does not disappear. Rather, as Marquardt argues, there is a role reversal: the parents abdicate their task, and the child - now "between two worlds" - is compelled to take it up.

Marquardt emphasizes what ought to be obvious, but what our culture is reluctant to acknowledge: that children are not cognitively, morally, or emotionally equipped to do such work as even adults have found too difficult. Moreover, what they lose through divorce is precisely the foundation of their development. The vow of marriage is supposed to make spouses the guardians of love; the irrevocability of their promise is supposed to place that love beyond the realm of mere choice. The first lesson of divorce to children, by contrast, is that differences can be resolved by making the relationship optional, as Marquardt points out. But a child is his parents' relationship personified, and divorce thus calls his identity fundamentally into question. The stories of this book show vividly that, in consequence of their parents' option to exit the spousal relationship, children of divorce become "little adults," "early moral forgers," and "child-sized old souls" as they are confronted with innumerable new options in order to maintain a transformed relation with each parent. Too early, these children must decide for themselves what to believe and whom to trust, as their parents' worlds increasingly diverge. An intact home itself, quite apart from more explicit efforts by the parents, educates a child by grounding his identity in their unity; divorce, too, educates - by calling much a child relies on implicitly into question.

Marquardt's argument is clearly elaborated, well-reasoned, and amply illustrated. She examines the meaning of divorce without bitterness, in order to cast light on a suffering that is too often swept under the rug by a society that has favored adults' rights over children's well-being. Her stories and her judgments offer a picture of the human heart that deserves further reflection. And her study gives evidence for Spaemann's insight: what children need most, she says, is to witness daily their parents' commitment to love and forgive each other as they forge a single world for their family.

Children of Divorce: An Overview of the Recent Literature

LISA LICKONA

Thomas, Susan Gregory, *In Spite of Everything* (Random House, 2011).

Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe, *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family Life* (Vintage Books, 1996).

Wallerstein, Judith and Blakeslee, Sandra, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (Mariner Books, 1996).

Wallerstein, Judith, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study* (Hyperion, 2000).

Marquardt, Elizabeth, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (Three Rivers Press, 2005).

Root, Andrew, *The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Baker Academic, 2010).

Every generation has its defining moment, Susan Gregory Thomas argues in her biting, but sweetly endearing, memoir *In Spite of Everything* (Random House, 2011). Some kids grew up in London during the bombings of World War II. Others grew up in sleepy American suburbia, with a bombing going on inside their own hearts. That, she claims, is the state of her generation - Generation X - whose childhoods have been defined by the experience of their parents' divorce.

After her father leaves her mother to marry his secretary, Gregory Thomas's world changes dramatically. She muses at length on the impact of her parents' divorce - on everything from her safety as a child (she loses her innocence at the age of thirteen to the nineteen-year old son of the neighbors who are babysitting her) to her confused vision of love (serial casual hookup-ups co-exist with romanticized dreams of finding

a soul-mate) to her frenetic search for the perfect home (the home she herself never had). Gregory Thomas has amazing pluck - she pulls herself up by her bootstraps, gets herself into Columbia University, and forges a successful writing career. She marries, has children, and "in spite of everything" strives to love her children even after her own marriage falls apart.

But a pervasive theme is the experience of loss, of the void, that opens up inside of her after her parents split. Early on, Gregory Thomas describes the strange disorientation that she experienced at the age of eleven:

After my parents divorced, one of the sad, weird things that happened was that I completely lost my bearings in the night sky. As a kid, I was the undisputed Pleiades and Little Dipper Finder. I can still find them, but it takes me forever. I can't see Orion unless it is pointed out to me (p. 33).

The break-up of her parents' marriage causes Gregory Thomas to suddenly become lost in space - literally and figuratively. Indeed, Gregory Thomas sees the Star Wars saga (which first hit theaters in 1977) - with its "archetypes of home, wounds, stars, ice, and fathers" - as emblematic of the entire generation of kids born from the early 1960s to the early 1980s that has lost its inner bearings because of divorce. In early adulthood, she says, she herself was like the "rogue planet" of the Star Wars saga, a planet lacking a navigation system, condemned to wander aimlessly through space. Gregory Thomas is stunned to discover in her husband-to-be, Cal - a child of an intact family - a stable center, a moral certainty, and a solidity that is beyond her own experience. Cal knows what he thinks is right:

It simply never occurred to Cal to allow his moral compass to be pulled in any direction other than his own. Me, I would have given anything to have a moral compass, my sentient planet's missing piece of equipment. My center, to the extent that I had one, had never held. It was more like a hazmat container for high-pressure gas. Reading *Heart of Darkness* in my junior year of high school, I'd felt an instant, horrible sense of kinship with Kurtz. The wilderness had found me out early, too - and it echoed loudly within because I, too, was hollow at the core. The major difference between Kurtz and me was that I was too afraid to allow the horrifying nihilism that lived inside me to penetrate the membrane of my persona, which talked all the time and liked clothes. A line from a Billy Bragg song sums it up: "a little black cloud in a dress" (p. 79).

"Hollow to the core", "horrifying nihilism," a center that does not hold - Gregory

Thomas's testimony is stark and shattering. But it rings true to many children of her generation.

In his *Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Baker Academic, 2010), Andrew Root, whose parents divorced while he was in graduate school, records a similar experience of insubstantiality afterwards, a feeling of being "undone." Drawing on the testimonies of children of divorce, Root concludes that nothing of what a child is told about his parents' divorce can touch the more profound reality of who the child is - the fruit of the union of a man and a woman, a union which the child relies upon for the foundation of his very being. When the union fails, the child feels the impact in a place that the parents themselves cannot. Strategies for improving the resilience of children through the divorce process cannot touch this place precisely because it is the divorce process itself, the dissolution of the marriage, that is the source of the child's wound.

Root's argument, which will be discussed in greater detail below, draws on the best of the research that has been done in recent years on the experience of children of divorce. This small but growing body of literature, based on the testimonies of the children themselves, tells a different story than the one we are accustomed to hearing - that, while divorce is hard on a child, he can overcome the difficulty with the right combination of social support and education. Indeed, the story of the children of divorce challenges us to think more deeply about what we mean by love, marriage, family.

A good starting place for understanding this story is Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family Life* (Vintage Books, 1996). Whitehead is interested in divorce as an idea, an "ethic" if you will, that is instantiated in literature and law, and, above all, in the hearts and minds of Americans.

Our country was born in political dissent, she argues, and it is no surprise, therefore, that since its inception American society has been more tolerant of marital dissolution than its European counterparts. But it was not until the twentieth century that cultural support for divorce exploded, fueled by a "psychological revolution" in which the sources of authority for Americans shifted from family members and clergymen to psychologists and therapists. Increasingly, the value of marriage was judged in terms of "personal fulfillment." From the 1970s on, authors - specifically women authors -

began to produce memoirs of divorce as liberation. Divorce rapidly became viewed as a necessary option for ending not only an abusive relationship, but also one in which either spouse felt "stifled" or "crushed." This "expressive divorce" followed a capitalist logic: the individual "invests" in a relationship, hoping for a return. When the relationship no longer "pays," one is free to invest one's emotional capital elsewhere (p. 76).

Until the 1960s, Whitehead recounts, the majority of married couples believed that "you stay together for the children." Divorce was considered a negative outcome for a marriage because it spelled the loss of parental unity and separated the children from their father. But "expressive divorce" inspired a different judgment. "In contrast with the earlier view which linked the children's interests to the parents' marriage, the new view tied children's interests to the emotional well-being of each parent, but particularly the mother" (88). In other words, a divorce that freed a parent from an oppressive relationship ultimately liberated the children as well. A (relatively) peaceful divorce, therefore, was to be preferred to a conflictual marriage.

The "first wave" of thinking about the impact of divorce on children speculated about possible positive effects. These children would be survivors; they would evince a special maturity that came from living through a divorce. But by the mid-1980s, Whitehead argues, a "second wave" of researchers - armed with a dose of "hard" social science - implicated divorce as a significant cause of problems affecting children, among them being behavioral issues, dropping out of school, and poverty. The studies showed that the impact of divorce in the life of a child was often long-term, chronic, and persistent.

And yet, Whitehead says, the "second wave" of thinking on children and divorce has had little impact on the divorce ethic. Instead, a consensus has emerged that divorce is a necessary evil, a required "trade-off" between children's happiness and the freedom and happiness of the parents. A brisk trade has developed in books that promise to help children regulate the loss experience, a sort of "biliotherapy" invoking reassuring mantras like "your parents still love you, even though they don't love each other anymore," while at the same time providing children with a new identity within a victim class. A significant societal shift has occurred, Whitehead concludes - from the idea that divorce harms children, to the idea that the harm is worth it. This is the foundation of the divorce culture - divorce as a way of life, an adult entitlement. "The culture of divorce recruits social support, compassion, and sympathy for the divorcing grown-ups and maintains a discreet silence about the plight of children"(p. 106).

Alongside the divorce culture, a new ideology of family has arisen: the "Love Family." Before the divorce culture, Americans understood the family primarily as that institution whereby a man and a woman are united to their children through blood (or adoption), sealed by bonds of love. By contrast, in the Love Family biological bonds are insignificant, even irrelevant; the sole unifying force is affection. "Love makes a family" but not necessarily marriage and procreation.

There is, however, one big problem: the children themselves. Children don't fit well into the ideology of the Love Family. A Love Family is created by choice, and children are not choosers - they are not "players" in this game of build-a-family: they cannot choose their parents, they are dependent on them; they cannot initiate and maintain relationships, but are dependent on those who are bigger and stronger than they to do this. Nor can they "give back" in affection in a way that matches the investment of their parents.

What, then, is to be done in the face of the divorce culture? In her final pages, Whitehead argues that the best start is "recapturing a sense of the purposes of marriage that extend beyond the self" (193). Certainly much more could be said on this topic, but what Whitehead presents in *The Divorce Culture* amounts to a startling challenge. In its unflinching and persistent willingness to address the subject of divorce head-on, Whitehead's book stands as a minor cultural classic.

One of the more significant pieces of "second wave" research on children of divorce that Whitehead highlights is psychologist Judith Wallerstein's effort with co-author Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (1989). Beginning in 1971, Wallerstein initiated a landmark longitudinal study. Her novel approach was to go "beyond" the statistics in order to discover what is going on in the heart of the family through in-depth face-to-face interviews with spouses and children. She followed her subjects and interviewed them at five and ten-year intervals after the divorce. In *Second Chances*, she convincingly shows that, even ten years later, many children and their parents were still struggling to integrate the life-change of divorce.

In 1994, Karen, one of the original children in the study, made contact with Wallerstein and asked to meet. In this meeting Karen frankly and poignantly described her struggles to find happiness in marriage as she continued to weather the fallout of her parents' divorce. As Karen told it, the divorce had changed not only her

circumstances, but her way of viewing the world, effectively leaving her psychologically and spiritually handicapped when it came to love and commitment.

Hearing Karen's story convinced Wallerstein to extend her previous study and to interview the now-adult children twenty-five years after their parents' split. In *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study* (Hyperion, 2000), we learn that Karen's story is far from exceptional. Divorce, it turns out, has far-reaching effects in the lives of all of Wallerstein's subjects. Moreover, the inclusion in the book of the stories of adult children of intact families permits Wallerstein (with co-authors Blakeslee and Julia M. Lewis) to draw conclusions on the ultimate impact of divorce on the family as a whole. "The post-divorce family," she tells us early on, "is a new family form that makes very different demands on each parent, each child, and each of the many new adults who enter the family orbit" (p. 10). Wallerstein painstakingly paints the picture of the new family form in the words of the children.

Because of the lived reality of divorce, she finds, the children lose the chance to be children. Children rarely remember playing after the divorce. Forced to travel between two homes or be the emotional support for their own sometimes-devastated parents and siblings, children of divorce grow up more quickly than others. In contrast, in intact families, parents "create a safe and supportive place for children whose job... is to go to school, play, make friends, and simply grow up." (p. 24).

The experience of divorce stands in the minds of most children as the beginning of a time of uncertainty and upheaval that ultimately marks their view of the world. The circumstances of divorce, with two parents trying to "begin again," mean that family structure disappears. "[W]hen families come apart, the needs of every member diverge" (p. 221). The child is expected to "move on" just as his parents have, but this is not easy. The lack of structure is more difficult for boys than girls. It is devastating to a special-needs child.

Many children of divorce had little idea that the divorce was coming. Afterwards, "the world is newly perceived as a far less reliable, more dangerous place because the closest relationships in their lives can no longer be expected to hold firm" (p. 27). The experiences of repeated losses in the form of second and third divorces and the multiple sex partners of some parents only confirm this sense. Karen says: "Both my parents played around. I saw it all around me. They felt that if you are not getting what you want, you just look elsewhere"(p. 30).

In the minds of children of divorce, their parents' marriage is a lost image which can

never be achieved. Not surprisingly, children of divorce find it harder to find a mate than their peers from intact families. Indeed, Wallerstein argues, living in an intact family is a powerful education in courtship and marriage.

When children of divorce do get married they are more likely to divorce than children from intact families. Moreover, two out of three children of divorce in Wallerstein's study chose not to have children themselves because they did not want to put their children through what they had gone through. Some admitted to not wanting to make their parents grandparents (p. 68).

Divorce, Wallerstein argues, leads children to conclude that "nothing is stable" and that nothing good can last. And the lack of stability and unity in their lives leaves a profound mark on their sense of self-worth. In a particularly touching passage, she speaks to this suffering:

The divorce disrupted your life. It came suddenly, unexpectedly, but you realized it was caused voluntarily by the people you loved best and trusted the most. You concluded again, logically and sensibly, that nothing is stable. Anything could happen and change is probably for the worse. Since your parents assured you that things would be better, but they weren't, you drove your feelings underground even more - where they became more powerful. Like most children, you kept all these terrifying conclusions to yourself because you loved your parents and didn't want to upset them. They were so upset already. And finally, like a child, you blamed yourself for the breakup. You must have done something bad to drive them apart. You thought you were the most powerful villain responsible for the family disaster. If your parents were fighting over you, and if you hadn't ever been born, then they wouldn't have quarreled. You don't deserve to have good things happen. You certainly don't deserve to love or be loved (pp. 62-3).

It could be said that with *Unexpected Legacy* Wallerstein has initiated a "third wave" of research that points beyond the measurable "negative aspects" to a deeper analysis of what divorce is - namely a new family form. Wallerstein's sensitivity as an interviewer draw us into the lives of the children of divorce and draws forth our compassion. A few of the stories she permits the kids to tell are so absolutely heartbreaking that it is hard not to conclude that something has gone seriously awry in our divorce culture.

Ultimately, Wallerstein wants to hold both things together: the advocacy for the child of divorce and the rights of the parents to choose divorce. Indeed, Wallerstein and

Blakeslee, in addition to writing a book on how to make good marriages, have penned a more recent book teaching parents how to make a "good divorce" (What About the Kids? Raising Your Children Before, During, and After the Divorce). Nevertheless, Wallerstein's efforts with her co-authors have provided us with a treasure of research from which writers, researchers, parents, and children will be drawing for some time to come.

Elizabeth Marquardt confirms and deepens Wallerstein's research but draws a different conclusion. Only two when her parents divorced, Marquardt lived the life of a child of a "good divorce" - she continued to remain close to both her mother and her father, and she was certain that both parents loved her and wanted her. Entering adulthood, she appeared to have survived and thrived through the divorce experience, earning multiple degrees and forging a happy marriage. But Marquardt felt an inner gnawing that she could not categorize - she wondered whether others like her felt it. Marquardt's *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (Three Rivers Press, 2005) is the fruit of a controlled study that Marquardt conducted with noted family researcher Norval Glenn, aimed at understanding the hidden experience of children of divorce.

Between Two Worlds convincingly argues that there is no "good divorce" because "divorce powerfully changes the structure of childhood itself" (p. 12), rearranging the elements in the child's world so significantly that his very identity is affected. An intact family, Marquardt argues, is created through the intentional union of a man and a woman - and, throughout the life of the family, it is the continuation of this unity that provides the place where a child can be a child. Parents bear the responsibility for bringing together their separate worlds - differing beliefs, traditions, and plans. Children remain for the most part unaware of the difficult work that parents do to maintain the unity and coherence of their relationship - but this does not mean that they do not benefit from it. Rather, it is the active and persistent melding together of the parents' own two worlds into one - with its compromises, cooperation, and even disagreement and occasional dissent - that makes possible the coherence and safety of childhood.

When parents divorce, they stop trying to unify the marriage, but, perhaps not surprisingly, the work of unifying does not cease - it is taken up by another, namely the child, who is, after all, the fruit of the unity of the man and the woman. Forced to live "between two worlds" - a life exemplified most obviously in the necessity of the

child to travel between the now-separate homes of mother and father - the child takes upon himself the work of uniting what now is, in fact, not possible to unite. Whereas before the divorce childhood is mostly carefree, after the divorce the child, with his meager resources (he is a child, after all), must function in two separate places with two different sets of rules and expectations. He becomes a chameleon and a champion at keeping secrets. Marquardt summarizes:

When a cell divides, it creates two new cells, each with its own nucleus. Likewise, when a divorce divides a nuclear family, it creates two new families, each with its own nucleus. But divorce does something strange in the process of family cellular division. In intact families, the children are the nucleus and the parents protectively surround them. After a divorce, newly apparent adult vulnerabilities have a way of turning the family structure inside out. Each parent moves to the center of his or her own new world, and it's the children who are now on the outside, keeping a wary eye on them, even trying to protect them (p. 37).

In short, Marquardt forcefully argues that for a child of an intact family, childhood is all about me. For a child of divorce, it is all about them. And that, Marquardt shows in her study, is no sort of childhood.

Marquardt's study probes the inner states of two sets of adults - children of divorced families and those of intact families. The families are further divided based on whether the divorce was good or bad and whether the marriage was basically happy or conflictual. In *Between Two Worlds*, Marquardt weaves the results of her study and her personal story with the narratives she gleaned from seventy-one interviews with adult children of divorce. Although some of the conclusions that Marquardt draws parallel Wallerstein's, her work is uniquely forceful because it is grounded in her own experience as a child of divorce; she writes with the authority of an "insider."

It is the details that reveal the difference. Like the doctor who discovers the hairline fracture that is causing the patient constant pain, Marquardt discerns the hidden dilemmas that haunt children of divorce and continue to challenge their sense of identity. From the outside, these may seem unremarkable - something as simple as a child resembling one spouse more than the other, or mom's house being stricter than dad's. But Marquardt shows us that the first case signals the loss of identity and the threat of being rejected by the parent one does not resemble, while the second provokes a deep moral drama that leads the child to assume different personas in different places.

It becomes particularly clear that the need to be a different person in different houses - a task that few outsiders recognize as the hallmark of the divorce experience for children - causes children of divorce to be more cautious, less trusting, and less morally and personally coherent than their counterparts from intact marriages. Divorcing parents lose their ability to work together in presenting a coherent view of the world. As a result, children of divorce find themselves adrift.

Marquardt, who holds a Masters in Divinity, is particularly interested in the spiritual dilemmas in the heart of the child. From her we learn that children of divorce tend to be more spiritual and less religious than children from intact families; deep spiritual longing stands alongside a distrust of "organized religion." One particularly poignant picture that Marquardt paints is the single child sitting at the back of a religious service, while the children "with parents," are in the front pew. The child of divorce, robbed of the chance to approach God through the natural means of the family, remains guarded and distant. As Allison, one of Marquardt's interviewees, frankly admits, "If the most important relationship in your life, which of course is the one with your parents, is irretrievably broken at a young age, and one of the defining components of your life is that - that core relationship was not there, you have to have fundamental trust issues." In short, children of divorce find it harder to feel "at home," in church.

In her conclusion, Marquardt spills quite a lot of ink critiquing the false premise of the "good divorce" which, she says, resounds with "happy talk" engineered to make something that is never "good" at least palatable. Not surprisingly, Marquardt is not too interested in giving advice on how to make a better divorce. She is focused on helping parents make marriages last. Divorce, after all, is a choice of the parents; it is also their choice to stick it out.

Like Elizabeth Marquardt, Andrew Root in *The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* is concerned with the profound inner damage inflicted by divorce. A professor at Luther Seminary and himself a child of divorce, Root argues that society has yet to grasp divorce's true effects:

We have assumed that if cushioning social structures are in place, the impact of divorce is nullified or at least greatly diminished. But divorce is more than an issue of social capital or simple psychology (like self-esteem) for we are more than our place in the structures and knowledge of society. Even if young people preserve their social

capital and understand why their parents split up and what the divorce means it still leaves a mark that cannot be erased by retained social capital or correct knowledge. And these are marks that last well beyond the age of custody, for divorce is ontological (p. 46).

To support his thesis that divorce affects a child in his being, Root invokes a range of sources, from Heidegger to Barth to "object relations psychology," all the while remaining consistently grounded in the concrete testimonies of the children of divorce. His work helpfully explains the inner dilemmas that Wallerstein and Marquardt have uncovered.

Root has given a name to the nameless terror that engulfs the child when faced with the divorce of his parents, a terror that Root knows all too well. He describes the feelings that gripped him and his fiancée, Kara, on the eve of their marriage, as, incredibly, both learned that their parents were heading to divorce court.

Kara often wakened in the night to find herself overwhelmed by fear. There was never anything specific to the fear, no fright of something supernatural like a ghost, no worry that an intruder had picked her apartment lock. It was just blind fear, fear she could articulate only as fear of being alone. I understood this, because I myself was feeling it, sleeping most nights on the couch so that when the fear enveloped me I could try to escape it by turning on the TV. It was an odd kind of fear, for it had no form, no rational categories to talk myself beyond it. It simply felt like I was losing my being, as if in the midst of my sleep I could simply disappear, fade away into nothing. It was the fear that now that the union that created me was dissolving, I might dissolve with it (p. 44).

Such a fear arises in the heart of the child of divorce, Root argues, because, in modernity, the being of the child is at odds with the future-oriented self that realizes itself through choice. Drawing on the work of object relations psychology, Root argues that the child derives "ontological security" from the reliability of the bonds that he has within the family. The child depends on the bonds with mother and father in order for him to act with confidence in the world. But the parent considering divorce sees these same bonds as limitations that close out the possibility of a brighter future. When the parent chooses to divorce, he or she makes a move to grasp this future for himself; but the child, who is linked to the parents not by choice, but by a biological past, is "left maneuverless" (p. 33). He who cannot choose is now at the mercy of his parents' choice.

Since this choice destroys the bonds upon which the child necessarily for his ontological security, he faces the world with new-found uncertainty. If the relation of mother and father, which is the bedrock of a child's life, can disappear, it seems that anything can happen. A void opens within him. The child is threatened by non-being and God becomes untrustworthy. As Root says, "Divorce smothers the holy." At the same time, the child feels as though he ought not to exist. The parents' choice to divorce throws the original validity of their union into question, striking at the heart of the child's being. "I am not sure I ever loved your mother," becomes to the child, "I wish you had never been born."

The philosophy of Heidegger grounds Root's explanation of the ontological insecurity that afflicts children of divorce. For Heidegger, our being is more than what we know; it is embedded in our day-to-day life, in particular, in our relations. We are constituted in such a way that we are unable to simply extricate ourselves from those with whom we are related. Our being is being-in-relation.

Heidegger's account helps us understand the disintegration that Marquardt describes in the child of divorce. When the family falls apart and mother and father separate - founding different homes, different lives, and often embracing different values - the child, whose being depends on this lived unity, struggles to retain a coherent sense of his own self. No amount of "happy talk" can erase the impact of the divorce, for this impact is deeper than the "reasonable" explanations given for the divorce.

Being as "being-in-relation" is further deepened by Root through the thought of Karl Barth, who develops the biblical teaching that man is made "in the image of God" (*imago Dei*) with specific reference to the Trinity. For Barth, we image the God who is eternal relation in our own relationships, in and through communion with others. Relation constitutes our being; "without another with whom to be in relationship, there can be no me," says Root (p. 73). Where this is most evident, of course, is at the origin of a child's being in the one-flesh relation of a man and a woman. And this original relation continues to constitute the child's being, as parents continually act to create a family through their love - a veritable image of the Trinitarian God of Love. When a marriage ends, it is impossible for the child, whose being flourishes in and through the relation with his parents, simply to "move on." As Root says, when reflecting on the implications of his parents' divorce for his own family, "As painful as witnessing the last act of my parents' marriage was, the problem with divorce, for children, is that its ending is never an ending. It instead becomes a more complicated way of being-in-the-world" (p. 88).

Since the child becomes who he is in and through the loving action of his parents, when the parents choose to end that action, when they cease to make a family, the child finds himself unable to understand his own being. This highlights a common refrain of children of divorce - that they would rather have lost a parent to death than their family to divorce. For the death of a parent (except in the case of suicide) does not happen as the result of a deliberate act, and thus the child does not experience it as direct threat to his own being. Only when the parent directly acts against the relationship that constitutes the child - undoing the marriage and thus the family - does the child experience the attack on his being. For the child, being begins in love. When love becomes hatred, animosity, coldness, and finally non-existent, then the child's sufferings become profound.

For Root, the "good divorce" is based on the premise that happy parents make happy children. But the point of marriage is not to make children happy, he counters. It is to create "ontological security," to ensure, that is, that a child knows who he is and where he has come from. This security comes from a shared environment, involving rituals that enable the child to come to know himself in and through the relations of the family.

Having discussed the ontological impact of divorce, in his final chapter Root gives concrete examples of the kinds of help that the church can give to children of divorce. The church offers not a program, but "its very life, its community of fellow sufferers" (p. 122). The church offers to the child new and certain bonds on which the child can rely. "Love" makes this community, the new "family" that Root believes the church can be for the child. But the church does not create community through the love of its members (as in the "Love Family"). Rather, it is the love of an Other, the one who made them, redeems them, and calls them to himself, that makes the church. What the church does is radiate this love, the love that they have received.

Key to the church's ministry to children of divorce is providing opportunities for the child of divorce just to "be" in relation with others. Root, who is himself a professor of youth ministry, emphasizes the need for open time and space in the midst of planned outings and opportunities, since it is in these unstructured moments that the child of divorce has the chance to recover a sense of his self through the tenderness of others. "Being with others provides us our being because to be, to discover ourselves as real, we must experience ourselves through the gaze of others" (p. 124). In the church the child can encounter the relation that constitutes him, that grounds him in reality. He finds a center; he discovers the ground beneath his feet.

We may wonder, however: will congregations that are come to be through choice (the choices to be in this congregation rather than that congregation, to embrace this creed rather than that one) finally support a sense of the family as rooted in being? Can Americans, who value mobility over place, action over contemplation - as evidenced in the abundance of "programs" at many churches - provide opportunities for children just to "be"? Root candidly admits that this is not the "normal" focus for most Protestant churches. But it is certainly a worthwhile - indeed, a necessary - goal.

Reading Root, with his compelling sense that the child of divorce continues to need a home - where he can simply "be" and discover himself through the love of others - I could not help recalling the "ache" of Gregory Thomas, who, after the rootlessness of her youth, spent a large chunk of her adulthood remodeling (and then losing) her dream home, the perfect little nest for her and her babies. Elizabeth Marquardt also records the intense desire of the children of divorce to create a safe haven for their own children - something they have not had themselves.

But making a home for one's own children is an uphill climb for children of divorce. As Wallerstein convincingly shows, they have few resources on which to draw for the creation of a stable marriage for themselves. The journey that can be done only perilously in adulthood is made more surely in the intact family as the child comes to be who he is amidst the love of mother and father.

If the being of the child is served best by marriage, then it is imperative that in our quest to help children of divorce we discover what marriage is. Marriage, it is true, begins in the consent of the spouses - and so it hinges on human freedom and choice. But in marriage human choice touches something beyond itself. By receiving a child, a man and a woman find themselves - quite unexpectedly, perhaps - at the origin of a new person, who will first discover his place in the cosmos, the meaning of his very self, in the welcoming embrace of these two people. If we take the experience of children seriously, are we not led, somehow, to the threshold of the sacramental, to the idea that the marital union itself ought to signify and make present a love that does not end? And, at the same time, doesn't this reality, finally, correspond most adequately to who we really are as expressed in the longings of the children of divorce?

We need something far better than a good divorce. We need to discover what it is to be "in relation," to live being as gift. As Root says, "In the logic of a relational imago Dei

we find our freedom, not away from others, but in giving ourselves to others" (p. 93). Could this freedom be experienced even in the midst of the intolerable marriage? It is a far cry from "expressive divorce." But it is what the reality of the child cries out for.