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# Ending marriage, keeping faith: a new guide through the spiritual journey of divorce

Ronald C. Nelson

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Guatemala and Nicaragua are making up an increasing number of the Hispanic population in North America. These women have arrived within the past decade, and many of them bring rich experience with the post-Vatican II church and Base Christian Communities in Latin America. I would have liked to hear their voices added to the voices of women from Puerto Rico, Cuba and Mexico.

Although I was happy to see the content summarized in Spanish at the end of each chapter, the book would be even more usable if the whole content were printed in Spanish and English. I would like to be able to place the verbatim interviews, the analysis and the authors' conclusions in the hands of Hispanic women who do not read English.

This book stands out as an attempt to approach theology from the vantage point of *Hispanic women living in North America*. Its special focus critiques "the racism/ethnic prejudice to which feminism in the United States and Latin American Liberation Theology seem to be prone." By insisting on the personal experience of Hispanic women living in North America as the starting point in the process of their own liberation, it makes a very special contribution to the field of theology. The authors and their community are practising a theology that values their own communal socio-political-economic experience as they struggle together for liberation.

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## **Ending Marriage, Keeping Faith (A New Guide through the Spiritual Journey of Divorce)**

J. Randall Nichols

New York: Crossroad, 1991

209 pages U.S. \$17.95 hardcover \$11.95 paper

My problem in writing this review is that it is difficult to be objective. The author writes from personal experience and I read from the same. As Nichols says, "divorced is not something you get; divorcing is something you do." As the jacket says, "Though filled with pain and confusion, divorce can be experienced as a kind of spiritual journey rather than an absolute ending. So the purpose of this book is to help others see their way more clearly through this soul searching experience."

Nichols begins by saying there are 343 books in print about divorce and wonders why he should write another one. I am glad he did. Because, as he points out, we need to deal with the "spiritual". It is interesting we begin marriage in a religious setting but end in a legal setting. In fact, if one reads only the introduction it is worth the price of the book.

His second reason for writing this book is because it is his own story and Nichols has received help from the writings of others so he now wants to

share his experience. So it has been with me. Theory is always needed, but it also takes one to know one. J. Randall Nichols is a Presbyterian minister and counselor so he has been on both sides, professional and personal. He deals with the pain as well as the therapy.

“Divorce is not falling off the path, it is taking a different one.” Nichols points out that divorce is a journey not an ending or a beginning so that in fact “We never get divorced, we are always divorcing.” So Nichols points out five stages of divorce similar to the stages of grief, which it is. Again, it helps to see in print what you have gone through.

I really appreciated Nichols’ thesis that a “friendly” divorce doesn’t make sense. If we could be “friendly” we maybe wouldn’t be divorced. It does not mean we must be unfriendly; it just means we have to be real and honest. As Christians we always try to be kind, decent, and so forth, but as Nichols points out, yes, we should be civilized; that means keeping the peace instead of being “friends”. Frost wrote “Good fences make good neighbours.”

Another freeing thought for me was Nichols’ statement “Divorce is not a sin.” It is rather, “a complex of behaviours and experiences, some of which may be sin but not a single theological concept.” Nichols points out that even Roman Catholics do not believe divorce is a sin but remarriage is. Thus, divorce does not exist for them, an interesting concept.

His chapter on “What the Bible Doesn’t Say About Divorce” is well worth the price. He balances this chapter with the “Hard Sayings of the Bible About Divorce”.

Nichols’ reasoning is that marriage is two-sided and, if those two sides can no longer work together, it is over. God’s covenant is entirely God’s work and that is never over.

So while divorce shouldn’t happen, it does. J. Randall Nichols has helped me deal with that in my own life and in my ministry with others. Nichols’ last chapter is entitled “The Misunderstood Help of Marriage Counseling”. Nichols deals with five myths in counseling. So on both the personal and the professional levels Nichols has tackled the stereotypes and, as he says, so I say “Now I both laugh and cry more easily, and I look out upon the future unfolding before me with both greater trepidation and greater hope than I ever did before.” This book is a personal story for Nichols and this book review is a personal story for me.

We all want to get to heaven but none of us wants to die. I hope that no one who reads this book has to deal with divorce personally or professionally, but if you do, read this book.

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