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## "Stephen G. Post, More Lasting Unions: Christianity, Family and Society (Religion, Marriage, & Family; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000)"

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distinctions put forth between romantic desire, friendship, and unconditional agapic love, though they could have been more fully integrated in the context of human love. Particularly welcome was the development of forgiveness as part of the act of love – a point often understated because of the typical idealization that usually accompanies a discussion of the various “loves”. The only problem with this chapter, from a theological point of view, is the notion that God loves in terms of “desire”. To desire is to need. If God needs anything – God is not God. The end of the chapter reminds one how careful theology should be when discussing human love/divine love and where distinctions should and need to be made.

The remaining chapters of the book treat topics such as sex, power, family, singleness, and divorce mainly from the paradigm established in the first four chapters. Of particular interest is the very honest and heartfelt final section titled “10 Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me about Marriage”. Here we find both pastor and friend honestly communicating lessons learned over a lifetime of direct ministry.

Overall I liked the method of the book – going to biblical sources first, looking at elements of church history second, and finally offering some contemporary insights. Of course, when so much is being covered on so many topics, one can only skim the surface of these issues. While there are definitely drawbacks to this approach, it remains an effective pastoral conversation that will benefit anyone – Protestant or Catholic – who is serious about marriage ministry. I recommend this book as an introductory look at concrete pastoral

issues with some theological reflection on an increasingly complex and challenging focus of church ministry – married love and married life.

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POST, STEPHEN G.: *More Lasting Unions: Christianity, the Family and Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – X, 205 p.

The purpose of this well considered and well written book is exactly as the title suggests: to propose a healthy family spirituality that will lead to more successful and happy marriages. The beneficiaries of strengthened and renewed marriage bonds will be the whole Christian Church, society in general, and of course the members of specific families, for families are the “seminary of the Church” (Jeremy Taylor), the “seedbed of the state” (Cicero), and the “primary institution at the base of our existence as human beings” (John Paul II).

Post contextualizes his study within the culture of divorce and single parenthood, already very prevalent in modern American society and now gaining ground in Europe and elsewhere. The post-1968 view that “no-fault” divorce is a boon to women and children is refuted: divorced spouses suffer emotionally, psychologically, and financially for years, and the children of divorce carry lifetime scars that manifest themselves in depression, educational failure, unemployment, and repeated divorce and single parenthood. Modern media culture is at least partially to blame, for it has created a myth of perfect marital bliss: images of

ever greener pastures and painless family rupture tempt even the mildly troubled to abandon spouse and children in search of a personal El Dorado. Roughly half of newly contracted marriages end in divorce; 70% of these couples could be reconciled if the partners would accept to remain in, and work to improve, an imperfect union for the long term good of their children and society as a whole.

P. positions his line of thought within the broad stream of American Protestantism, with a certain pride of place to Evangelical Christianity, though he is open to both Roman Catholicism and liberal Protestantism. Given the centrality of the Gospels and the Epistles for all these traditions, P. conducts a careful examination of the teachings of Jesus on marriage, children, and family. He concludes that while Jesus placed discipleship in the Kingdom of God on a higher level than family responsibilities and loyalties (e.g., Mt 8,8-22; 10,35-36), he did so to condemn patriarchy’s systematic oppression of women and children, not to condemn the family as such. The nuclear family comes to fruition with the larger family of God. P. sees that there are grave problems in a too autonomous conception of the family, one that would relativize to the point of practical denial the universal obligation to love all persons and not only one’s kin.

The above mentioned openness to Catholicism is especially apparent as P. works to develop a spirituality of the family. Protestant traditions often see marriage as a true covenant and not merely a contract. Matrimony and family can and should be a holy vocation, a means and a manner of



encountering the divine and of incorporating grace into the fabric of one's life through the faithful fulfillment of the responsibilities of family life. In this question, the alert reader will notice an example of the renewed Protestant interest in the Catholic language and experience of grace through sacrament as applied to marriage.

It is exactly this language of sacrament that could expand and complete one of the more innovative and interesting chapters of P.'s book. "Adoption is, in [many] ways, the most lasting and beneficial solution for children whose birth parents doubt that they will ever be able to raise their children safely and responsibly" (119). Adoption fulfills the vocation of married persons who happen to be infertile. It also meets the needs of children whose birth parents are unable, for whatever reason, to raise their children. And a renewed and strengthened culture of adoption benefits society as a whole by embodying justice, substituting for abortion, modeling hospitality, and affirming the dignity of all human persons. P. constructs a positive theology of adoption based upon the Pauline notion that we are all adoptive sons and daughters of God through the grace of Christ Jesus (Galatians and Romans). P. is faced with the difficulty that society as a whole tends to undervalue the relationship between parents and their adopted children (140). This reviewer would propose the sacrament of baptism (or the rite of Christening for those Protestants who practice believer's baptism) as the most apt ecclesial expression, both sacred and communal, of the bond, both historical and eternal, that is thus established between this child, these

parents, the community of the faithful, and the Lord God.

P. dedicates an equally interesting and creative chapter to the challenges of "intensive family caregiving". Caring for children has always been a principal end of marriage. Recent scientific and technological progress have made caring for aging and enfeebled parents a second family duty. Higher mortality rates in the past meant that a relatively small percentage of any given population reached very old age. As average life expectancy rates move into the eighties in the decades to come, at least in the First World, the phenomenon of caring for very old parents will become ever more commonplace. Now Alzheimer disease affects about three percent of those aged sixty-five and rises steeply to affect an estimated 50 percent of those over eighty-five (153). With no medical remedy in sight, it is likely that caring for the "deeply forgetful" as they are slowly stripped of past and future, of capacity and of autonomy, will become normal. P. suggests possible avenues of spiritual reflection on care-giving and on personhood in such cases. Jesus commanded his disciples to love without measure and to have a special care for the neediest. "Kierkegaard's definition of true Christian love as love that cannot be reciprocated is here fulfilled in a particularly painful way, for the neighbor who is stranger was once a beloved spouse, parent, or friend" (157).

For a Catholic reader, the book is at once interesting and challenging. P. has chosen to couch his ethical arguments in prophetic language. "One must care for the weak"; "we must find a balance between love of family and love of stranger"; and similar injunctions

are sprinkled throughout the text. Yet the reasoning behind these charges is not always apparent. At times, obligations are based upon biblical commandments from either testament; at other times, social scientific findings are cited to ground moral obligations; and at times natural law theories are cited to mitigate or nuance biblical commands. Thus the normativity of particular ethical claims is not always clearly explained. P.'s penchant for synecdoche is somewhat distracting; while he is generally careful to provide nuanced summaries of the approaches and practices of different Christian traditions, he does at times take a particular tradition for the whole, generalizing that "Christianity teaches...". These minor matters aside, this is a fine book and a valuable contribution to the series of studies on religion, marriage, and family at the University of Chicago, sponsored by the Lilly Endowment.

P.'s work will appeal to both students of religion and family care professionals who seek to understand and to foster marriage and family life today.

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DEMO, DAVID H./ALLEN, KATHERINE R./FINE, MARK A. (Eds.):  
*Handbook of Family Diversity*,  
New York/Oxford: Oxford  
University Press, 2000. – XVIII,  
460 p.

The editors have assembled in their *Handbook* an extraordinary collection of essays, which promotes and illustrates a most comprehensive understanding of "family diversity". One of the main intentions of this