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Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice **Andrew Cornes**

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993, 528 pp., £15.99, ISBN 0340574348

RÉSUMÉ

Nous avons là la présentation la plus énergique de la thèse de l'indissolubilité du mariage. Les principes bibliques comme les préoccupations pastorales y sont abordés. Cornes maintient que par sa nature même le mariage est indissoluble. Il présente le problème d'une manière claire, honnête et complète. Cependant un travail théologique supplémentaire serait nécessaire pour appuyer cette thèse. L'exégèse de Deutéronome 24 en particulier est peu satisfaisante. Bien que nous puissions dire avec John Stott que cet ouvrage est indispensable, nous ne pouvons pas le considérer comme définitif.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies ist die überzeugendste Verteidigung der Meinung, die die Unauflöslichkeit der Ehe vertritt. Dabei werden sowohl biblische Prinzipien wie auch Seelsorge in der Praxis behandelt. Die Hauptthese von Cornes ist, daß die Ehe wesensmäßig durch ihre Unauflösbarkeit bestimmt ist. Diese These vertritt er sorgfältig, fair und klar verständlich. Trotzdem ist tiefergehende theologische Arbeit nötig, um seine Hypothese zu untermauern. Besonders sein Umgang mit Deuteronomium 24 ist unbefriedigend. Obwohl man dieses Buch mit John Stott als 'Pflichtlektüre' bezeichnen kann, ist das letzte Wort zum Thema noch nicht gesprochen.

Andrew Cornes deserves an accolade for this book. All the more remarkable as it is his first, 'Divorce and Remarriage' combines serious theological thought with lucid style, fair argument and clear logic. Too many books have now been written on this subject to expect over-much by way of new insights, but there is no doubt that this is the most persuasive presentation of the indissolubilist case which has yet appeared. This is the book which dissolubilists will have to

answer! And Cornes does something which has been neglected among indissolubilists—he proposes a wide-ranging pastoral strategy based on his exegetical conclusions and covering the wide variety of problems caused by remarriage today.

The book is divided into two sections prefaced by an introductory chapter on the contemporary situation and followed by four excellent indices together with a definitive bibliography. Section One deals with 'Biblical Principles' in seven formidably comprehensive chapters in which Cornes systematically treats every passage of Scripture relating to divorce. Along the way he gives invaluable information about divorce and remarriage in Jewish and Roman society as well as about the patristic understanding of the subject. Speculation and wishful thinking are dealt a severe blow by his thorough research.

Section Two expounds 'Pastoral Practice' in four chapters entitled 'Educating', 'Caring', 'Reconciling' and 'Bearing Witness'. The sharp end of the book appears in the final chapters of each section, but the one which concludes 'Pastoral Practice' reveals the author's concern to contribute to the current Anglican debate. It will ruffle many feathers—no 'via media' in sight here! However, Cornes' main concern remains one of arriving at a truly biblical theology of divorce and remarriage and I doubt whether his case can be made more powerfully or clearly. I found myself questioning my motives whenever I disagreed with him.

The central thesis of the book is that marriage is *intrinsically* indissoluble by its very nature. Therefore divorce is always—or nearly always—a sin. Remarriage certainly constitutes adultery and polygamy. This he sees as the nature of things from the beginning, the overall thrust of the Old Testament, the explicit teaching of our Lord and the implicit teaching of Paul. Moses, accordingly, cannot be made to bear a greater weight than that of regulating, while deprecating, divorce while the exceptive saying of Jesus does no more than grant permission to separate from an immoral partner (to which Paul is seen as adding a further permission—to accede to desertion by an unbeliever). In neither case is remarriage acceptable: singleness is the only righteous alternative and divorce requires it, thus holding open the door to reconciliation.

Despite my admiration for Andrew Cornes'

grasp of the issues and his evidently fair-minded approach to them, I feel his argument has three major flaws.

The most fundamental one is that his case stops short of a sustained theological exploration of its central thesis. He does all the spadework to show us how he arrives at his indissolublist position. But another chapter seemed to be waiting in the wings, where he would return to Scripture and theological debate to set his view in a wider context. What, for example, is the biblical status of polygamy and how does his view of remarriage as serial polygamy compare with it? What New Testament moral material would he use as evidence of such adultery now that he has linked remarriage with the Seventh Commandment? Is there a difference between how 'straightforward' adultery and remarriage should be viewed biblically, as opposed to its pragmatic or pastoral dimensions in a modern church situation? To be frank, this is where a theology of divorce and remarriage would emerge and it is surprising that a book with this title does not contain it. Dissolubilists do not have this problem, of course. For them, a theology of marriage is a theology of remarriage. The indissolublist needs another framework.

The second criticism is almost as important as the first. Cornes very fairly and honestly demonstrates a curious fact about virtually all the biblical passages concerning divorce and remarriage. The more closely one engages with them, the more difficult it is to bring them to a plain—especially a plain indissolublist—meaning. We are constantly alerted by the author himself to surprises of grammar, vocabulary and context. Yet his conclusions exclude the slightest uncertainty. I watched Cornes patiently defuse each exegetical bomb under his arguments as he moved from text to text, but I for one still heard them ticking afterwards. This was most noticeable in his treatment of Ezra/Nehemiah in which divorce was commanded, of course, in pursuit of righteousness. For those who hold that marriage is *inherently* indissoluble this is a truly mountainous obstacle. Yet it was the only OT material Cornes did not treat in its own right, preferring to bracket it in with his discussion of Malachi. I do not think he faced his difficulties squarely at this point.

My final observation, given the limits of space, is that Cornes does not satisfy his own need to reconcile indissolubility with Deut. 24. A more liberal approach could simply say that the law was unfortunate if not wrong, but Cornes is not a liberal. A Roman Catholic would be able to say that our Lord gave a new and higher meaning to marriage—that indissolubility is related to the

raising of marriage to sacramental status. But a conservative evangelical maintains the Reformation view of the unity of Scripture. Progressive revelation may clarify what precedes, to be sure, but it will not entirely reverse it. So Cornes reasons that marriage has not changed under the New Covenant, and indissolubility is the real, if somewhat cryptic, message of the Old Testament. Indeed, he must justify the OT law in terms of the Pauline affirmation that it is 'holy, righteous and good'.

This creates a number of problems for him over Deuteronomy. First, why is the supposedly adulterous remarriage not simply forbidden in a law which Cornes acknowledges has a clear purpose if not a clear meaning—to regulate the existing practice of divorce and remarriage? After all, other laws actually do restrict and even forbid remarriage in certain circumstances. Second, why does it forbid returning to the first (inherently indissoluble, he claims) marriage even when the subsequent one is ended through bereavement? Third, why does the law pass over the adultery of remarriage when the Seventh Commandment already exists and adultery is a punishable offence?

Cornes' answer is, I think, as follows: (a) the law deals exclusively with one issue—returning to the first marriage; this narrowness of focus is sufficient explanation for Cornes of its otherwise strange silence on broader issues; (b) the second marriage defiles the first by being a form of adultery and thus makes it somehow (he admits to difficulty here) impossible to restore the first marriage; (c) the law should therefore be understood to mean that it is the first marriage and not the subsequent one which is being protected. In short, Moses sanctifies the first marriage by absolutely forbidding a return to it.

Now, I realise the Hebrew mind delights in paradox but this is an argument I cannot say convinced me at a first reading. Why is this so important? Partly, because Cornes' whole argument rests on assuring us that remarriage is, at the very least, deprecated whenever it occurs. Otherwise he must reckon on a more lenient view of remarriage in Scripture than is possible for his thesis. But there is a further implication. If our Lord upholds the true meaning of the Law against popular abuse by his formula 'you have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you' (which is part of the approach Cornes takes), and if that Law countenances remarriage, Cornes would have to consider much more seriously than he does that Jesus may be asserting something other than indissolubility in His own teaching. For the fact is that Cornes relies very heavily indeed on his belief that wherever else Scripture is unclear, the

message of indissolubility is patently obvious from our Lord.

As a matter of fact, this takes us to the heart of the dilemma for a biblical ethic of divorce and remarriage. The OT passages do seem to be more tolerant than at least some of Jesus' sayings as they are presented to us in the Gospels. But if Cornes was not convincing in his attempt to solve this problem, he did demonstrate some suggestive parallel themes, such as a concern over marriage to unbelievers and higher standards required for spiritual leaders. It may be here that further work will shed light.

John Stott praises Cornes' book so highly as to say it will become 'indispensable reading for everybody who is anxious to develop a Christian mind on these topics'. Indispensable, yes. Final, no.

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Religion in an Age of Science

Ian G. Barbour

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RÉSUMÉ

C'est le premier de deux volumes reprenant des 'conférences Gifford'. Il aborde tout d'abord des questions générales sur la nature de la science face à la religion, puis il traite de la théorie scientifique, et consacre la troisième partie à des sujets théologiques et philosophiques. Barbour est un penseur de la tendance 'process', dans la ligne de A. N. Whitehead. L'ouvrage, par sa clarté, pourra rendre service au lecteur laïc, mais l'auteur ne soumet pas assez sa propre position théologique à un examen critique.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies ist der erste Teil eines zweibändigen Werkes basierend auf den 'Gifford Lectures', bestehend aus drei Teilen. Zuerst werden allgemeine Fragestellungen zum Themenkomplex Wissenschaft und Religion behandelt. Der zweite Teil dreht sich um Wissenschaftstheorien, und im dritten Teil werden theologische und philosophische Schwerpunkte untersucht. Barbour ist ein Anhänger der Prozeß-Theorie (process thinker) nach dem Vorbild von A. N. Whitehead. Obwohl das Buch klar geschrieben und hilfreich für den Laienmitarbeiter ist, leidet der Autor unter mangelnder kritischer Distanz zu seiner eigenen theologischen Grundüberzeugung.

Professor Barbour put a slightly earlier generation heavily in his debt with his *Issues in Science and Religion* (1966). He has now, in the first volume of his Gifford Lectures for 1989-91, updated his handling there of the areas where science and religion meet. For science has not stood still in the intervening quarter of a century. That interval has seen, for example, to take the three main areas Barbour covers, (i) in quantum physics, Bell's inequality and the Aspect experiment; (ii) in cosmology, the detailed investigation of the period just after the 'big bang' and Hawking's hope of eliminating the initial singularity; (iii) in evolutionary theory, the development of sociobiology and the 'punctuated equilibrium' of Gould and Eldredge. Barbour has kept up to date with these and a great many other developments and he has given a lot of intelligent thought to the impact they have had, or are thought by some to have had, on religion, and more specifically on Christianity.

In the first part of the book, before he comes to the present scene, he considers more general questions about the nature of science and its relation to religion, including similarities and differences of method. In the second, he treats of current scientific theories, including those mentioned above, and of their presuppositions, insisting that there are holistic laws and descriptions which cannot be 'reduced' to lower-level ones. In all this section, his book is particularly helpful; the amount of new information for the layman which it contains is huge, while his discussions are clear and give fair space and treatment to opinions with which he does not himself agree (though the present reviewer thought him a little too brusque with mind/body dualism). He deals carefully with the widespread view that 'anthropic' arguments suggest deliberate design of the universe (though his lectures came too soon to take into account Paul Davies' *The Mind of God*) and with the alternative suggestions of total necessity or a multiplicity of universes. Here he seems on the whole to favour the first, though he writes at times as if he wanted only to show that the latest theories and speculations were compatible with theism, not that they in any way supported it.

In the third section Barbour moves on more definitely philosophical and theological topics (not that these have been overlooked in the earlier sections, but that there they were comments on the main topics, not main topics in their own right). It is here that he sets aside the judicial air of his earlier pages, and writes from the point of view of his own personal commitment, which is to 'process thought' in the tradition of Whitehead. Chapter 8 is a description of this metaphysic,