

**Marriage and its Modern Crisis:
Repairing Married Life**

A. Storkey

London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, xi + 240 pp. £8.99.
ISBN: 0–340–67107–6

RÉSUMÉ

Storkey analyse les causes et les raisons de la crise des relations conjugales en Occident, en adoptant un point de vue chrétien sur le mariage. Il affirme qu'une conception chrétienne du mariage, non seulement nous fournit un diagnostic de la crise des mariages en Occident, mais indique aussi le moyen d'en sortir. Le livre a pour but de montrer combien la foi chrétienne est cruciale pour un mariage heureux, et de stimuler ainsi les chrétiens à s'engager plus pleinement dans la vie conjugale.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Storkey analysiert die Ursachen und Gründe für die Krise ehelicher Beziehungen im Westen, indem er eine Christliche Perspektive bezüglich Ehe bezieht. Er geht davon aus, daß eine Christliche Perspektive bezüglich Ehe uns nicht nur eine Diagnose der Krise westlicher Ehen liefert, sondern auch den Ausweg aus dieser Krise weist. Das Ziel dieses Buches ist es, aufzuzeigen, wie zentral der Christliche Glaube für eine erfolgreiche Ehe ist, und es somit Christen zu ermöglichen, ein erfüllteres Eheleben zu führen.

In the preface to *Marriage and its Modern Crisis*, the author declares that 'The immediate context of this book is the increasing concern and debate over family issues in the media and politics in Britain and beyond' (p. ix). The book is part of that debate. It analyses the reasons for the crisis of marriage in the West and argues for Christian truth as the solution. It is an exercise in Christian sociology (not theology or ethics). As such, it rejects the approach of many sociological texts that claim to be behavioural and value-free, without any explicit perspective. It adopts a sociological perspective that regards the Christian perspective as the 'necessary one for the fullest level of insight into the meaning of personhood, marriage and family' (p. x). This allows the author to critique Western norms of meanings and culture. 'It allows one to be neither modernist nor postmodernist, both

institutional and subjective, both structural and action-oriented' (p. x). The author claims that adopting a Christian perspective on marriage is a choice, a choice that not only presents us with a diagnosis of the crisis of Western marriage, but also shows the way out of this crisis. Thus, the aim of this book is to demonstrate how central the Christian faith is to successful marriage and so to allow Christians to enter more fully into married life.

The author describes and assesses major models of marriage of cultural importance (the Judeo-Christian, the family-centred, the power dominated, the individualist, the romantic and the moralist marriage), and he concludes that those generating a level of crisis in Western marriage are the individualist model (i.e. focusing on individual happiness for relationships), the romantic model (i.e. viewing marriage as a passionate relationship between two perfect humans) and the moralist model (i.e. accepting moral rules for marriage without addressing the meaning and motivations that shape love). Storkey uncovers contemporary trends which are rooted in a distorted view of marriage, such as premarital sexual partners, overwork in paid employment, sex as industry, isolated social units, gender manipulation and hostility, and the desire for an ideal home.

Having outlined the character of Western marriage and the nature of its crisis, Storkey explores systematically the Christian view of marriage. Storkey defines marriage as the voluntary, lifelong, exclusive, total, committed, loving union of two equal persons, man and woman, according to God's created purpose and before God. Throughout the rest of the study, the author relates the biblical picture to the crisis in modern marriage and vice versa, and he translates the Christian principles of marriage into practical suggestions. The various issues Storkey addresses include the deeper aspects of what is learned from the families of the partners' origins about marriage, personhood, values, faith, culture and the ethos of family life; the nature of friendship in relation to dating and marriage; the different models and meanings of cohabitation; the central lessons people need to learn in marriage about themselves as persons; sex and marriage; gender and marriage; work and marriage; law and marriage; the developing stages of marriage. As Storkey brings together the various explanations as to why marriages today might be failing, he claims that all reasons for marital breakdown can be tackled,

although not in a mechanical process. The process of recovery has to be a process of Christian faith: 'At its simplest, being followers of Jesus Christ is the best way to heal a marriage' (p. 204). Storkey argues that this change in faith and culture can happen in the lives of individuals and couples, but can also be reflected in the media, economics and law.

Marriage and its Modern Crisis helps readers to see the world with new eyes. It stimulates readers to wholesome thinking (and living) as the author uncovers the lies surrounding marriage and marital breakdown in our culture and invites us to see our world from God's perspective. The healthy combination of theoretical reflections about the nature of modern marriage with practical reflections about its outworking, makes this book one of the best about marriage I have come across. Its very readable style is a further asset. I therefore recommend this book warmly not only to people whose marriage is in a crisis, but also to those who want to keep their marriage fresh and healthy and to those who are about to enter into married life.

Gabriele Renz
London

EuroJTh (1998) 7:1, 70-74

0960-2720

Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age

**J. Richard Middleton and
Brian J. Walsh**

London: SPCK, 1995, 250 pp. pb. £12.99
ISBN: 0-281-04938-6

RÉSUMÉ

Middleton et Walsh analysent ce qu'ils appellent la vision du monde moderne, la vision post-moderne et la vision chrétienne. Ils décrivent une culture en crise, tourbillonnant dans les rapides d'un changement d'époque. Les certitudes de progrès du projet moderne ont été abandonnées et remplacées par le spectacle fatal du carnaval hyper-réel. Middleton et Walsh soulignent avec raison le caractère narratif des opinions du monde, l'importance des relations humaines et de la dimension communautaire, ainsi que l'importance éthique de la compassion. Ils racontent une histoire poignante, faisant grand usage de la littérature, de la musique, du théâtre et des films contemporains, et vont fouiller dans les

travaux des biblistes récents pour imaginer un christianisme désirant ardemment être accessible au monde post-moderne, sensible à la souffrance, enraciné dans le projet de Dieu pour la création et soulignant l'ouverture illimitée de la Bible. Trois thèmes forment la trame du livre La Vérité est plus étrangère qu'autrefois: une historiographie de la crise, une célébration de la marginalité et une éthique de l'improvisation. En dépit de son style agréable et de son exégèse stimulante, le livre n'échappe pas à une certaine confusion quant à l'histoire contemporaine, il élude la question de la nature de l'autorité biblique et le cœur éthique de la pratique chrétienne s'y trouve érodé. Ce livre aurait gagné considérablement, au moins en clarté, si les auteurs avaient tracé plus précisément les contours de la modernité et de la postmodernité, s'ils avaient étayé avec davantage d'exemples leur proposition pour une pratique chrétienne et s'ils n'avaient pas cédé aussi facilement aux effets de leur apparente désaffection pour la communauté évangélique.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Middleton und Walsh analysieren und vergleichen, was sie als das moderne, postmoderne und christliche Weltbild bezeichnen. Sie porträtieren eine Kultur in der Krise, herumgewirbelt in den Schnellen der epochalen Wechsel. Die fortschrittlichen Sicherheiten des modernen Unternehmens sind zurückgelassen und durch das unheilvolle Spiel des hyperrealen Karnevals ersetzt worden. Middleton und Walsh betonen zu Recht den narrativen Charakter der Weltbilder, die Bedeutung von Beziehungen bzw. der Gemeinschaft sowie die ethische Relevanz des Mitgefühls. Sie erzählen – reichhaltigen Gebrauch machend von zeitgenössischer Musik, Theater, Film und Literatur – eine fesselnde Geschichte und beschäftigen sich intensiv mit der neueren biblischen Wissenschaft mit dem Ziel, ein Christentum zu entwerfen, das darauf brennt, postmodernen Menschen zugänglich zu sein, d. h. das sensibel ist in bezug auf Leid, verwurzelt in Gottes schöpfungsmäßiger Intention, und das die 'open-endedness' der Bibel betont.

Drei Themen, die *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be* durchziehen, verlangen nach unserer Aufmerksamkeit: die Historiographie der Krise, die Feier der Marginalität sowie die Ethik der Improvisation. Zwar ist das Buch mit einer vortrefflichen Prosa und anregenden Exegesen gewürzt, doch leidet es daran, daß es mit Irrtümern hinsichtlich der zeitgenössis-