

PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE

A READER

THIRD EDITION



EDITED BY MICHAEL WARREN

*Perspectives
on Marriage*

— A Reader —

THIRD EDITION



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Introduction

Kieran Scott
Michael Warren

With the wide use of *Perspectives on Marriage*, especially in college- and university-level courses on marriage, we have been asked for a third edition, updated with important new material in the four years the 2001 edition had been in print. It now appears the reader itself has sparked renewed academic interest in the question of marriage and in the endless search for wisdom on marriage issues.

Readers familiar with the first and second editions will find we have maintained much material from the second edition and reinstated some important essays from the first edition. In doing so, we have been directed by the many teachers who have given us critical feedback on the previous two editions. Research by Oxford University Press into this book's actual use was invaluable to us in constructing this new third edition.

Perspectives on Marriage remains a "reader" that would be of interest to anyone concerned with marriage at the start of a new millennium. Teachers know this as they read and reread chapters they have already assigned to previous classes and are now assigning them once more. In our view this book has particular energy for those teaching "the course on marriage." Students seem to flock to such a course, spurred on by their own relationship difficulties and their desire to understand better the ecstatic yet difficult "love relationship." There is so much distortion about erotic relationships today that some who come to our classes come as "relationally wounded," searching for solace and wisdom.

Some teachers find the marriage course unfolds easily and often leads into intense discussions about the nuances of relationship. The readings here offer grounding in research and careful reflection for those discussions. Our hope is that the material we have provided will be, in reality, an intellectual gift from the writers whose ideas and opinions are found here. The readings provide a solid platform for informed talk about relationships, and even about their being a marvelous gift from a loving God.

Most teachers of the university-level course in the theology of marriage see their efforts as an academic enterprise, not a ministerial or church one. They seek to disclose historical traditions, including religious ones, affecting marriage, while attending to recent social and cultural shifts in attitudes toward the practice of marriage. Still, an academic course dealing with the religious dimensions of marriage will have some things in common with church efforts in ministry to marriage. One of these is concern for marriage preparation.

Despite the fact that more and more young people have come to question whether a “legal” or formal marriage is necessary or even advisable, students continue to crowd into the theology of marriage courses looking for insight and wisdom about a troubled institution. They know the stakes for them in this enterprise—however they may choose to approach it—are quite high. Bristling in the midst of our students are all the important dilemmas about what it means to be alive at this moment in history. Our goal in this reader is to press them with radical questions and humanizing perspectives that have important consequences for their futures. If they become more thoughtful about the issues and more constructive about their decisions, our efforts will be well rewarded.

Any course that puts marriage in a religious perspective has the possibility of contesting some currents in contemporary culture that are hostile to enduring commitments—hostile to the kind of love ethic needed for successful parenting over the long haul and hostile to the wider networks of support needed for families in the future. While some religious assumptions about marriage need critique, many religious convictions offer a radically humanizing view of the marital relationship, quite different from some of the depictions of marriage found in current film and television fare.

The readings in this collection contest various assumptions about marriage, including many recently created by a consumerist culture and some being challenged from within religious traditions themselves. Careful reading will spark earnest, if not heated, discussion and some conflicts over basic points of view. Many of the underlying, larger issues cannot be settled in a semester.¹ We expect many students will leave their courses with lingering questions needing continuing reflection: the seeds of emancipatory practice.

We recognize the variety of academic levels in what we have gathered here. Some readings are historically “dense” and will need careful preteaching before being read. Others make use of theologically sophisticated concepts that will also need explanation before becoming accessible to many students. Other fare is less weighty but not less important. We have included several popularizations of first-rate social science scholarship. The ideas and issues in such essays should not be dismissed as “magazine pop psychology” since they make accessible for serious and informed discussion sophisticated research conducted, in some cases, over several years.

Our hope is that the resources and ideas found here provide some part of a foundation for joyous, and struggling, life commitments.

Those familiar with the first two editions of *Perspectives on Marriage* will immediately note both what has been carried over from those editions and

the deletions and additions that make up this new edition. In some cases readings have been restored to full length, simplified, or even moved to a different section. Each reading continues to be followed by questions for discussion and, in some cases, titles for further study.

Part 1, “Marriage in Historical Perspective,” brings together a rich set of materials on marriage in the Jewish and Christian traditions. This material is indispensable for acquiring a developmental sense of religious teaching on marriage.

Part 2, “Contemporary Perspectives on the Theology of Marriage,” presents marriage as a basic Christian sacrament, a sign of God’s presence.

Part 3, “Marriage: Meanings and Transitions,” raises some questions young people have about marriage and offers an approach to marriage as a process of growing together.

Part 4, “Attitudes toward Sexuality,” is the longest section, with several provocative readings on the basic assumptions we bring to our relationships.

Part 5, “Communication, Conflict, and Change,” is presented as a key section on the issue of conflict and conflict resolution in marriage. All students are familiar with the problems it sets out, but not so many will have considered the kinds of changes in attitudes and behavior it calls for. The difference between conflict and violence is a key matter in these readings.

Part 6, “Issues Impacting Marriage,” looks at some recent scientific research on romantic love and the role of money in the wedding industry.

Part 7, “Commitment, Divorce, and Annulment,” acknowledges the failure, at times, of the marital ideal and its effects on people’s lives. Canonical and theological perspectives on divorce and remarriage are offered, and the dilemma remarriage poses for Catholics seeking ecclesial belonging is probed.

Part 8, “Spirituality of Marriage,” explores what it might mean to actually live out a deeply religious marriage in a time of consumerism.

Part 9, “Religious Traditions: Perspectives on Marriage,” is offered for the many students living in an increasingly multicultural and multireligious nation who bring to the marriage course questions about interreligious marriage.

Our metaphor for this third volume is also the wedding feast, a moment of hope and joy that unity is possible, that the spirit of God can reveal itself through human self-gifting. These readings themselves represent for us a kind of intellectual feast on the question of marriage, a question at the heart of what it means to be human.

NOTE

1. See the wise overview of marriage preparation from a religious perspective found in: Pontifical Council for the Family, “Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage,” *Origins* 26:7 (4 July 1996): 97/99–109. A key point in this document is its recognition that marriage preparation starts in infancy and continues right up to marriage.