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Dana Mack and David Blankenhorn (eds.). *The Book of Marriage: The Wisest Answers to the Toughest Questions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. xvi + 620. NP (Cloth).

[1] David Blankenhorn is the founder/president of the Institute for American Values and a long-time leader in the "marriage movement" in the United States; Dana Mack is an affiliate scholar in the Institute. This edited collection of readings about marriage is the latest contribution of the Institute to the movement. It is exactly what the cover blurbs claim it is, an engaging, literate, edifying, witty, insightful collection of thoughts about marriage from Aristotle, to the Bible, to the Qur'an; from Augustine to Maimonides, to Aquinas, to Luther; from Homer, to Shakespeare, to Erikson, to Bill Cosby. The excerpts, which are grouped into chapters covering why get married, the promise in marriage, life-long love, marrying in or out, money, who is in charge, children, conflict, divorce, growing old, were a joy to read and, in many cases, re-read after several years. And yet, as one who is part of the marriage movement and annually teaches a college marriage course, I was left uncomfortable.

[2] The Preface assigns the origin of the book to an earlier publication of the Institute, *Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: the Textbook Story of Marriage*, authored by sociologist Norval Glenn. He examined twenty leading college-level textbooks on marriage and found them seriously non-committal on the "m word" (marriage) and, in places, factually inaccurate. The release of *Closed Hearts* was accompanied by a call for serious, balanced, comprehensive, and accurate pedagogical literature on marriage. The *Book of Marriage* is intended to be such literature, "a book that will provoke lively discussion in a counseling session or a family studies classroom, but will also stimulate thought in a reading chair" (xvi). It can be that book, but only in the hands of a competent discussion facilitator. I doubt it can be that book on its own, simply by offering nude a variety of theoretical, religious, legal, literary, social scientific excerpts for the reader's provocation. The very complexity of marriage, which the editors rightly seek to underscore, and of the excerpts themselves, makes accurate interpretation of such diverse theoretical worlds difficult.

[3] An introductory essay, written by Don Browning, another prominent figure in the marriage movement, seeks to provide an overarching theory for understanding marriage as a

natural, social, legal, religious, inter-personal, unitive and procreative institution. It is standard stuff these days in any serious marriage book. There is also a brief introduction to situate each section. I believe the reader, certainly the undergraduate and high-school reader, would have been better served by a more sustained effort to highlight the meanings of the readings in each section. And the problem which *Closed Hearts* rightly raised, the problem of accuracy, arises here. Marriage is not an exclusively religious reality, not an exclusively Christian reality, and certainly not an exclusively Catholic reality. The Catholic tradition, however, has been in the marriage business for a long time and has developed an intricate set of overarching meanings about it. That tradition is represented in this collection by appropriate exemplars, but two of its most enduring tenets, sacramentality (66) and divorce (483), are not presented accurately. I agreed with *Closed Hearts* that accuracy is a must in any text book, and it is, therefore, to be required of this one.

[4] Marriage, and therefore also family, is in serious trouble in the United States. The first union for the majority of women is now not marriage but cohabitation; young people are delaying marriage and, when married, parenthood; the divorce rate continues to hover around its all-time high; and the birth of children to unmarried parents has skyrocketed. In this climate, I welcome this anthology as an important contribution to the marriage debate in the United States. I have, however, a final caveat. Marriage continues to be an important social institution, but it now plays a less dominant role than it once did. In the late 1990s, only 56% of adults in the United States were married; the remaining 44% were single, either never-married, divorced, separated, or widowed. Social and religious concern for the institution of marriage, and the benefits its brings to individuals and the society in which they live, must never be allowed to completely override concern for those who choose singleness or have singleness thrust upon them

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