

**AN EVALUATION OF CHRYSOSTOM'S THEOLOGY
OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

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In a previous article I detailed the major themes relating to marriage and family which can be found in Chrysostom's theological writings. This article seeks to step beyond the exposition of Chrysostom's writings to compare his theological view of the family with the view of the family presented in the family therapy literature.¹

A review of the literature suggests there exists a fundamental set of assumptions about families which is common to most, if not all, schools of family therapy. This set of assumptions is summarized in the following statement. "Families are relational systems which operate according to known, and implied, rules or beliefs and that these systems are able to shape both the Intra-psychic and the relational character of each individual who is a member of that system." This summary statement will, therefore, form the basis of the comparison which follows.

Families are Relational Systems

In the family therapy literature this refers not only to the 'relatedness' of family members but also to the pattern of relationships which exist within the family system. A family is not simply a conglomeration of individuals related either by birth or marriage. It is a system of interconnecting relational patterns. That is to say there are patterns and processes by which individual family members relate to one another. These relational processes are both discernible to, and measurable by, the outside observer (i.e., family structure, communication patterns, transactional patterns, and the quality of relationships).

¹ I am indebted to the work of Thomas Oden whose writings have challenged me to consider the possibility of there being a correlation between the family therapy literature and the writings of the Church Fathers.

Chrysostom's theological writings on marriage and family clearly demonstrate he understood the family to be a relational system. As a pastor and theologian he understood the importance of family structure,² communication and transactional patterns,³ not to mention the quality of relationships between individual members.⁴

Families Operate according to Known and Implied Rules or Beliefs

This statement implies at least three aspects of family life which merit our reflection. First, it implies there are rules of behaviour, beliefs about roles, etc., which inform marital and family life. Second, these beliefs about roles, etc., become evident in the way in which families organize themselves. Thirdly, these beliefs about roles, etc., will be evident in the way family members interact with each other. The first two of these are discussed in the section which follows. The third of these implications is included under a later discussion concerning the impact of family relations on individual family members.

Relationship of Rules and Beliefs to Family Life

Just as belief systems have a powerful way of giving direction and structure to a person's life, they also affect the direction and structure of family life.⁵ Nevertheless, the rules which govern life are not always obvious to the outside observer, nor are they conscious to the individual whose life they govern. Sometimes these rules of behaviour are verbalized. When this happens a person may have a clear sense of what may be expected of them. At other times a person may not even be aware there is a rule to govern a situation until he has inadvertently broken it and experienced the displeasure which comes from breaking rules. These rules, or expectations, for behaviour do not exist in isolation. Indeed, they are

² Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX, XXI; *Homilies on Colossians*, XII.

³ Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For a thorough discussion of the role of 'rules' within the family system see R.D. Laing, *The Politics of the Family* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1969).

informed or shaped by an individual's, or family's, beliefs about life. It must be noted, however, that the rules and beliefs which people may claim to hold may not always be what actually governs behaviour. For example, a person may claim to value the 'simple life', but if they are the proud owners of all the latest technology it is obvious they have a materialistic orientation which overrides the spoken message. Thus Beavers notes: "Observation is in many ways more trustworthy than reports of beliefs, and the congruence between the two is very important in determining the health of couples."⁶

Chrysostom's comments on family life reveal a basic understanding of the relationship between the family belief system and behaviour. For example, his advice on husband-wife relations is based on two assumptions. First, that both husband and wife profess faith in Jesus Christ.⁷ Second, that each of them is willing to allow the belief that the other is 'valued and loved by God' to shape the way in which they relate to each other. In the case of parent-child relations these same theological assumptions are at work, and are the basis of his directives.⁸

In the case of a family's responsibility to their own widows Chrysostom builds upon these two foundations with a third assumption, namely, "charity begins at home." Although Chrysostom concedes this is not a specifically Christian belief he makes the case that the value of theology is seen in the way in which people treat those they are related to.⁹

It is, undoubtedly, in this context we find the clearest resolution to the fact that the selection of Bishops is to be dependent upon the character of their family life.¹⁰ If behaviour stems from what is taught at home, and if what is learned at home is the family's true value system (and not simply that which is professed with the lips), then those whose households are in disorder may reveal more than their inadequacy to administer the household of faith. The presence of disorder may also be an indicator of the way in which their faith

⁶ W. Robert Beavers, *Successful Marriage* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985), p. 76.

⁷ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX, *Homilies on Colossians*, XII.

⁸ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XXI.

⁹ *Homilies on Timothy*, XIV, XV.

¹⁰ *Homilies on Timothy*, XI.

is, or is not, lived out in the home. The refusal to ordain such men would, therefore, not be punishment based upon the faults of others but rather a comment on what is perceived to be an inconsistency in the way the candidate lives out his faith.

Beliefs Influence the way a family organizes itself

Just as people cannot choose “not to relate”, systems cannot exist without order. To the outside observer a family’s organization may seem chaotic, dysfunctional, or highly enmeshed. Nevertheless the system possesses a certain ‘orderliness’ which gives it direction. Within a family system the structures which emerge are often indicators of the belief systems which govern a family. For example, a couple may claim that the husband is the “head of the house”. Yet, observation may reveal the wife to be exercising all the leadership functions while the husband is free to pursue his sports pleasures. In this situation the structure reflects a value system in which men may play like boys and are less responsible than women. Any attempt to adjust the behaviour system (i.e., make the husband more responsible) will have limited effect if it fails to address the values which undergird such behaviour.

In Minuchin’s *Structural Family Therapy* the family system is perceived as consisting of several distinct sub-systems which include: the spousal sub-system, the parental sub-system, the executive sub-system, and the sibling sub-system. In a healthy family, for example, the first three sub-systems are usually defined by the marital unit, while the fourth consists of the children.¹¹

In distinguishing between the parental role and the child role Minuchin has identified that the “family system” is both a system of individuals (i.e., mother-father-son-daughter) and a system of subsystems or role structures (i.e., parents-children). For Minuchin family health depends on these family structures functioning correctly. His approach to family therapy therefore seeks to understand the roles which each member plays and the function of these roles within the family system. For example, are all the child members

¹¹ Salvador Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

of the family allowed to function as children or, does one child function in a quasi-parental role? If that child is functioning in a parental role, what family need is this in response to? What beliefs, rules, etc. exist to maintain these roles?

As this illustration suggests, a second issue raised by the Structural School of family therapy relates to the appropriateness of the roles played by each family member. Specifically, "Are these roles appropriate to the individual's place within the family?" Minuchin believes the role of the child is to be distinct from that of the parent, and the role of parent is distinct from that of spouse.

Chrysostom's sermons and treatises on marriage and family life give evidence of an awareness of family structure which is consistent with Minuchin's observations. For example, whenever Chrysostom addresses husbands and wives, and gives them direction concerning the way they ought to relate to each other, he is addressing the spousal sub-system. His comments are not intended for anyone else but those who are married. His audience is clearly defined. The scope of application is also clearly limited to the transactions which take place between a husband and wife.

Chrysostom demonstrates his awareness of the executive functions of the marital unit when he shifts his attention from the couple's relationship to their household duties and social responsibilities. Once again, his focus is specific and precise. He directs his words to the adult members of the family unit and he instructs them regarding those transactions which affect the management of the household.

Finally, when Chrysostom addresses the parent-child sub-system he shifts his focus from the couple to the relationship between children and parents. Again, in these cases his audience and his counsel have precise limits. His focus is aimed at those transactions which take place between parent and child. His goal is that these interactions be positive and beneficial for both generations.

Subsystems, not just individuals, have boundaries. These boundaries, like those of the individual, need to be 'clear' (as opposed to being 'rigid' or 'diffuse'). In Minuchin's thought there needs to be a clear understanding of the differences between subsystems. This, however, needs to be done in such a way that neither subsystem is cut off from the other. Chrysostom appears to have had a similar concern in that his writings reflect a desire for

distinct structure, and role definition (a form of boundary definition). Yet, on the other hand, his writings call on husbands to “serve” and “love their wives sacrificially,” and wives to respect their husbands. In this way he establishes an interdependent relationship (rather than codependent) in which there coexists a clear sense of the individual as well a mutually beneficial togetherness.

Chrysostom’s awareness of system boundaries is particularly evident in his discussion on adultery and divorce.¹² In the midst of his theological and ethical arguments we discover he was keenly aware of the effect which adultery has upon the relational ‘boundary’ of the marital unit. Thus, he states, “If thou art to be curious of the beauties that belong to another thou art injuring both thy wife by letting thine eyes wander elsewhere, and her on whom thou hast looked.”¹³

Family Systems Shape the Life of Each family Member

Two aspects of this statement merit our consideration. On the one hand there is an educational dimension to family life. On the other hand, emotional well-being, family bondedness, etc. is directly affected by the quality of relationships which exist within a family. At this point the influence of the family system does not consist as much in what is said, or modelled, but rather in the way family members interact with each other.

The Family as a Learning Environment

Social Learning Theory is a cognitive-behavioural perspective which holds that people can learn new behaviour by observing others. Unlike other behavioural approaches which focus on the learner directly experiencing positive or negative reinforcement of their actions, Social Learning Theory holds that if a person can imagine or infer an anticipated reward this may be enough to reinforce behaviour. Thus, if Person A observes that Person B is consistently rewarded for being on time, and if Person A perceives a value in the reward received, then Person A will infer that if he is punctual he will

¹² *Homilies on Matthew*, XVII, LXII.

¹³ *Homilies on Matthew*, XVII.

also receive the same reward and will, as a result, adjust his behaviour accordingly.

Chrysostom's comments on the training of children reveal a clear understanding that the Christian instruction of children is not merely a matter of verbal instruction. Indeed, he is very much aware that patterns which are observed, and absorbed, in childhood often become behaviour in adulthood. Thus his counsel to parents, elders, and widows reflects an awareness of the ways in which the younger generation learns from the older generation which is very similar to the perspective of Social Learning Theory. For example, in Homily XI on the book of Colossians Chrysostom writes:

Hast thou a little daughter? Look to it lest she inherit the mischief, for they are wont to form their manners according to their nurture, and to imitate their mother's behavior. Be a pattern to thy daughter of modesty, deck thyself with that adorning, and see that thou despise the other; for that is in truth an ornament, the other a disfigurement.¹⁴

This quotation indicates Chrysostom understood something of the way in which behaviour patterns can be influenced by observation. Indeed, it is obvious he understood that a child's behaviour is shaped by parental behaviours and attitudes regardless of the parents' intentions. Furthermore, he appears to have considered that behaviours patterned in the home will themselves be evident in the life of the grown child. Thus he exhorts parents to make the process one which intentionally shapes behavioural development (i.e., "look to it lest...").

Relational Ethics: The Impact of Family Processes on Individual Family Members

¹⁴ *Homilies on Colossians*, XI.

In Contextual Family Therapy four aspects of family life are considered to be of importance: (a) The Existential Facts (i.e., Individual & Family History); (b) Issues of Individual Psychology; (c) Family Transactions and Power; and (d) Relational Fairness.¹⁵ Of these four, it is in the area of relational fairness that contextual therapy has made its greatest contribution.

Specifically, Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and his colleagues are interested in the degree of give and take, and the ethical nature of that give and take, within the family system. In Boszormenyi-Nagy's thinking the process of give and take has the power to build reliability and trustworthiness within families and to hold them together. This positive outcome takes place in a context in which the relational ethics of the family are characterized by decency and fairness between people. One key element in his perspective is that of entitlement. Basically, this refers to the fact that people have an inherent need to be treated well, to enjoy positive relationships, etc..

The presence of fairness, or positive give and take, within a marital or family relationship results both in a sense of trust and what Boszormenyi-Nagy calls constructive entitlement. By this he means that the one who gives of himself in a responsible fashion not only enhances the life of those who are the recipients of his actions, but he also benefits from his actions. As he acts in a responsible fashion the recipient perceives them as being fair and trustworthy with the result that the giver experiences that trust and the sense of security which attends it. Consequently, responsible actions which demonstrate positive regard for others are constructive actions which can result in a person's sense of entitlement being met.

An absence of fairness, on the other hand, results in mistrust and what Boszormenyi-Nagy refers to as destructive entitlement. This does not mean to infer that a person is entitled to act in a destructive fashion. Rather it refers to a way of relating in which a person lacks sensitivity, caring or concern for others. While on the one hand they may not wish to be treated the way they treat others, yet on the other hand, they are insensitive to the

¹⁵ For a fuller understanding of contextual family therapy the reader may wish to consider the following: Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine M. Spark, *Invisible Loyalties* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1973/1984); Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Barbara R. Krasner, *Between Give and Take* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1986); and Peter Goldenthal, *Contextual Family Therapy: Assessment and Intervention Procedures* (Sarasota, Fl.: Professional Resource Exchange Inc., 1993).

way in which their actions impact the lives of others. People who exercise destructive entitlement are those who themselves have experienced injustice within significant relationships. Life has been unfair to them and, as a result, they take what they can, when they can, from others in the belief that somehow they can demand that which must be freely given, namely affection, appreciation, loyalty, and trust.

Within the marital system positive give and take, thus marital health, occurs when partners are able to balance rights and responsibilities in a manner which is fair to both. Unfairness within the couple relationship is experienced when one partner perceives they are doing all (or most) of the giving in the relationship. At times this imbalance may be acceptable, possibly even necessary. For example, if one spouse loses his/her job the family readjusts its needs and wants to fit the new financial status. The working spouse may even shelve certain dreams which he/she has in order to meet the immediate needs of food, clothing and shelter. If, however, after a period of time the unemployed spouse makes no effort to find employment, the partner will begin to feel that he/she is making all the sacrifices. Eventually a sense of unfairness may settle in as the one partner becomes resentful of the other. Restoration of the balance of give and take in this relationship would require, first, an acknowledgement of the impact on the relationship of the unemployed partner's inaction. This would then be followed by negotiation and compromise so as to restore the balance of fairness within the couple relationship.

Within parent-child relationships positive give and take occurs when children experience their parents as acting in a manner which is fair. Unlike the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship is not a relationship of 'equals'. The child, especially a younger child, by his or her nature is dependent upon the parent for food, clothing, safety, nurture, etc.. In fact, there is very little a child can contribute to the life of the parent. Thus unfairness in the parent-child relationship occurs when the parent either withholds that which a child needs, or requires the child to give that which is not hers to give. When a parent withholds that which a child needs an injustice has obviously occurred. The other extreme, when a child is required to give what is not theirs to give, can be illustrated by the following example. Let's say a parent is raised in a home in which he experienced little love or nurture. In time he leaves home, gets married, and begins

having children. At first he is thrilled to be a parent and bask in the aura of physical closeness, etc.. For this person, however, parenthood may not be as much a matter of nurturing another life as it is a matter of meeting his own needs through the child. Through the child, the parent may feel loved, or accepted. The parent thus uses the child to meet his need for significance or value. The child then becomes the parent to his or her own parent, since the parent is acting out of self-interest. The injustice in this situation is that the child is not capable of fulfilling the parent's emotional needs. Furthermore, when the child gets older and begins to exert a will of her own the parent will feel abandoned by the child and may react poorly to the child's efforts to differentiate from the parent.

To the degree that parents are fair and responsible in their relationships with their children, they foster a positive sense of loyalty in their children. However, destructive loyalty can also occur in families. Two common forms of destructive loyalty are invisible and split loyalties. Invisible loyalties are unconscious commitments which children assume to help their families, usually to the detriment of themselves and others. One characteristic of these loyalties is that they are indirect rather than direct. For example, an adult child who rescued a parent from a suicide attempt may feel a sense of obligation to protect that parent and thus limit their life choices out of a belief they are helping the parent.

With split loyalties a person feels a sense of well-being towards two or more different individuals but, at the same time, perceives they must make a choice between them. A child whose parents are divorced is very likely to experience a split loyalty. Indeed, this sense of unfairness may become heightened when one parent remarries. On the one hand, the child may be excited by the event. On the other hand, if the other parent has not already remarried, the child may feel that being happy for his dad is somehow a betrayal of his mother. Another example of a "split loyalty" is seen in the case of an adult child who wrestles with a sense that he must chose between his parent(s) and his spouse.

Relational Ethics and Family Structure in Chrysostom's Thought

Margarite MacDonald has noted that a recurring complaint levelled against the Early Church was that it was a destroyer of families.¹⁶ For this reason it is not surprising to find that Chrysostom emphasized the "ordered" nature of the family system. One of the interesting dimensions of Chrysostom's views on family structure is the way in which he balances hierarchicalism¹⁷ with egalitarianism.¹⁸ Given that some in our day dislike his affirmation of 'male headship', it is worth noting that some of his best advice is directed to both sexes, and is thus egalitarian in nature. In this way it is apparent Chrysostom regarded the co-operative dimensions of family life as being important.¹⁹ For this reason authoritarianism (i.e., the use of power and control) and individualism (i.e., the placing of individual interest above group interests) are both unacceptable in his thought. Instead of authoritarianism Chrysostom advocates a radical concern for others for which he utilizes the Biblical concept of mutual submission. Instead of individualism he advocates co-operation. In both cases Ephesians 5:21-33 is both the theological and practical basis of his comments.

For Chrysostom "Headship" is not an entitlement which permits the man to act in a reckless or irresponsible fashion. It is not a role to be seized, or one which authorizes a man to act in a selfish manner. Rather it is a role which requires the man to act in such a way as to further the interests and well-being of his wife. Indeed, he states quite clearly husbands are to "painstakingly care for our wives and children" for, in "doing so we are making our obligation of headship an easy task."²⁰ Thus, while Chrysostom's view of the marital relationship appears to take the form of a structural hierarchy, his admonitions to husbands reinforce the importance of respectful give and take between marital partners. This suggests an awareness of the dynamics which, according to Boszormenyi-Nagy, can

¹⁶ Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Early Christian Women Married to Unbelievers," *Studies in Religion*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 221-34.

¹⁷ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX.

¹⁸ *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XIX, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, LXI.3-4.

¹⁹ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX.

²⁰ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX.

contribute to constructive entitlement. In this way we find Chrysostom's balanced view anticipates Boszormenyi-Nagy's emphasis on fairness and justice.

The theme of justice is also evident in Chrysostom's comments on the parent-child relationship where we read that parental authority over the children is not a dictatorial authority. Indeed, parents are instructed to nurture their children rather than exasperate them. In terms of Boszormenyi-Nagy's 'give and take' Chrysostom's instructions to parents give a very clear message that parents are to 'give' (i.e., nurture) rather than 'take' (i.e., exasperate).

We see then that Chrysostom's ideal Christian family is characterized as exhibiting a structure which balances hierarchicalism, egalitarianism, concern for others, co-operation, and mutuality. His writings suggest he was against rigid structures. For this reason the greater the degree to which a family shows concern for others the less extreme (and rigid) will its structures be experienced. Concern for others, therefore, moderates the way in which Role Structures are experienced by the family. The more a family expresses concern and love for its members the less likely it will be that its hierarchy will be considered as oppressive.

By emphasizing egalitarianism Chrysostom's sermons on the family provide opportunity for individual growth and identity as well as a hedge against the abuses which may result from one person dominating the household. Likewise, Chrysostom's comments concerning the role of the "male headship" are a caution against radical individualism which can result in either disengagement or chaotic relationships, while his emphasis on egalitarianism is a way of preventing enmeshment.

Relational Ethics and Family Communication in Chrysostom's Thought

Chrysostom had an interest in open, honest and respectful communication within families and between marital partners. This is evident in his comments to husbands where, drawing upon the Biblical doctrine of creation, he states, "Your wife is God's creation. If you reproach her, you

are not condemning her but Him who made her.”²¹ In another place he states that a husband must never exercise his authority by insulting his wife.²² Yet a third time he states, “Neither should the husband belittle her subjection, for she is the body. If the head despises the body, it will itself die. Rather let the husband counterbalance her obedience with his love.”²³ In each of these statements from *Homily XX* on Ephesians Chrysostom, mindful of the damage which hurtful words can cause, exhorts men to respect their wives and to exhibit that respect in their speech, as well as their conduct.

This same concern appears in his discussion on the relationship of wives to their husbands where Chrysostom advocates that wives ought to refrain from nagging their husbands.²⁴ In exhorting wives to use constructive (vs. destructive) communication Chrysostom encourages his hearers to consider the impact of their words on others. When put into practice this counsel would have the effect of creating a relational system in which there is a high level of mutual respect. Such a system of communication has the potential of creating a sense of constructive entitlement within a marriage.

In writing about parent-child relations he reminds fathers not to frustrate or exasperate their children.²⁵ His clear intent is to sidestep frustrating and demoralizing intergenerational encounters. Here Chrysostom offers a corrective to an age-old family problem. In his discussion of this command it is clear he wants Christian parents to deal fairly and justly with their children. In particular, he disapproves of two extreme actions, disinheritance and overburdening one's children.²⁶ Both of these behaviours have a verbal component. The one is demanding, while the other disavows the child. With this brief comment on Paul's instruction Chrysostom draws our attention to the fact that the things which parents say to their children are as important as the things they do. Thus, to act or speak as if the child does not belong, to disown them (or at the very least ignore them), or to not communicate with them, is to frustrate them. Similarly, to act in a demanding manner,

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI, and *Homilies on Colossians*, X.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

never satisfied, never praising, never encouraging will also result in the frustration of our children. Chrysostom, in his own way, once again advocates a relational style which, according to Boszormenyi-Nagy, will result in a healthy balance of give and take. Indeed, Chrysostom believed children whose parents behaved in such a manner would not find the yoke of 'obedience' to be burdensome.²⁷ It is in this context that children are advised to honour their parents.²⁸

Conclusion

Chrysostom's theological writings on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality were a response to the needs of his day. In spite of their historical nature these writings transcend the limits of history. The reason they continue to possess a degree of relevance is because Chrysostom's thought is not merely circumstantial. His writings, rather, demonstrate an understanding of at least some issues which affect the way in which families function. As such they reveal a view of marriage and family life which is clearly systemic in nature. Chrysostom was a preacher whose goal was to change the lives of people. While his goals or agenda are different from those of modern family therapists,²⁹ he nevertheless understood whatever happens within any family system affects the life of everyone within the family. He believed that the things he had to say about marriage and family life were of such significance that, once put into practice, they would change the lives of everyone within the household.

There are elements within his theology of marital and family relations which resonate with, and are anticipatory of, concepts which can be found in the writings of several different modern schools of family therapy. In particular we have noted that, on some subjects, Chrysostom's thought bears some similarity to the work of Salvador Minuchin and Ivan Boszormenyi-

²⁷ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XX.

²⁸ *Homilies on Ephesians*, XXI, *Homilies on Colossians*, X.

²⁹ In many ways Chrysostom believed his vision of the Christian family would transform family relations and usher the unbelieving heart into the Kingdom of Christ. For this reason Peter Brown states that Chrysostom's vision of the family was one which made the Christian family a form of lay monastery. Cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 320.

Nagy. These similarities exist on both the theoretical and functional level. On the theoretical level there are concerns with questions pertaining to family structure, subsystems, the interaction of subsystems, the role of structures, presence of 'clear boundaries', and the impact that one's actions may have on another. These similarities are quite substantial. On the functional level Chrysostom exhibits a structuralist approach to change in as much as he works with the existing familial structures. He also demonstrates some elements of a contextual approach when he urges marriage partners to act in such a way as to create goodwill in their spouse and children.

This is not to suggest there is some sort of organic connection between Chrysostom's thought and the family therapy literature. Indeed, the opposite is more likely to be the case. Certainly, if we look far enough, we will find dissimilarities between his views and those of some contemporary writers. These dissimilarities are not so great as to negate the value of his insights. Indeed, Chrysostom's theological reflections on family life contain elements which are beneficial both for individual development as well as for that of the couple. His writings can provide the thoughtful Christian worker with valuable theological insights for the integration of faith and practice in the work of family ministry.