

At the close of each chapter is a section called "Probe." It is made up of case histories, discussion questions, thought provokers, and resources. Some of this material is drawn from Martin's experience as a pastor of the Trinity Church of Seattle, Washington. This material is illustrative, challenging, and extremely practical.

This book may be studied with profit by ministers and informed laymen. It will not be easy reading for either group, but if it is accepted as a textbook and read with diligence and discrimination, it can open new avenues for the church in the fulfillment of its mission.

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Sell, Charles M. *Family Ministry: The Enrichment of Family Life Through the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981. 298 pp. \$11.95.

Probably no Christian would deny the importance of the Christian home or its foundational place in the life of the congregation. But to what extent and by what means the church should involve itself in family ministry is another question. Charles Sell, director of the School of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, points out that evangelicals have largely ignored the family-life emphasis because of its liberal base, because of its rooting in the behavioral sciences, and because it did not fit into their nineteenth-century style of approach to Christian education. In short, it was not conducive to their aims of reaching the lost and teaching the Bible.

Sell's aim is to undergird family-life education with evangelical theology while retaining the best of its sociological understandings. He attempts to weld the work of modern behavioral science to biblical passages in such a way as to meet the needs of the most conservative church leaders and members.

The author begins by describing the plight of today's family and the consequent need for a special home ministry. While faithful to Scripture, he expands traditional viewpoints in statements such as "The Bible doesn't demand that marriage be continued as a marathon of misery. It stresses the fulfillment of marriage, not merely the duty of remaining married. Church leaders are not discharging the whole of their responsibility if they warn against divorce but do not teach about marriage. Marital fidelity includes more than avoiding an affair; it demands that there be a growing, satisfying relationship between marriage partners" (p. 22).

Professionals who have taught that higher expectations have the potential for greater disappointments will not be surprised that "it is to be expected that as friendship becomes more important in marriage, more

marriages will end in divorce" (pp. 43-44), but these words may seem strange to Bible-based conservatives.

In developing his theological foundations, Sell weaves together appropriate Scripture texts to support the divine intent, monogamous nature, intimate relationship, commitment, and permanence of marriage. Given some rather conspicuous examples to the contrary, he makes a quite convincing biblical case for monogamy. In terms of the larger family, he finds theological underpinnings for responsibilities and roles, unconditional love, and the relationship of the family to society.

Sell identifies three dominant directions for family-life ministry: (1) *family-life education*, in which the church attempts to educate husbands, wives, parents, and children for family living; (2) *family nurture*, in which Christian teaching is centered in the home rather than the church; and (3) *family-unit ministries*, which involve a restructuring of the way the church conducts worship, recreation, and learning (p. 93).

Under the first division above, Sell develops a number of family-life education themes that are vital to Christian ministry. These include sharing feelings, handling conflict, marital roles, sexuality, dating and engagement, Christian parenting, facing crises, and managing finances. It is not always apparent how to provide evangelical support for these themes, but Sell handles the problem quite well. Of special interest is his explanation of the egalitarian arguments for order in the home in the light of Scriptures that if viewed superficially, seem to be contrary (pp. 101-104).

The author then proceeds to give capsule descriptions of a number of family-life programs that incorporate these themes. Marriage enrichment, marriage encounter, parent-effectiveness training, systematic training for effective parenting, premarital counseling, and the family-life conference are among those noted. Sell's task continues to be to identify the Christian components in otherwise-secular programs.

In the area of family nurture, Sell makes a strong case for home-centered Christian education. He finds special value in informal teaching: "Educationally, going from life's events to biblical truths is more rewarding than going from those truths to life's events" (p. 214). Besides, he also makes room for more organized methods such as family nights and a study curriculum coordinated with the Sunday School. Finally, he describes some family-unit ministries such as intergenerational experiences, family clustering, and family camps.

Sell has organized a broad coverage—almost an encyclopedia—of family ministries. At the same time he has succeeded reasonably well in his aim of bringing family ministry into the evangelical camp.

There are some weaknesses. The author tends not to distinguish between the group dynamics of marriage enrichment and the one-on-one concept of marriage encounter. In discussing the leadership and methods

of marriage enrichment, he completely overlooks David and Vera Mace, although this couple are the pioneers and pre-eminent thinkers in this field. In some places he seems to rely too heavily on secondary descriptions rather than primary source material. Evangelicals may be surprised to find that he favors the arguments *against* regular family worship (pp. 218-220).

Yet Sell's most important contribution may be the development of the concept he calls "the family-church family." The whole church is to be a family to all in its midst: nuclear families, single parents, youth, widowed, divorced, and aged. This ideal is in the finest tradition of Christian ministry.

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