

democracy an understandable concept, and considers what ‘learning for democracy’ might mean.

In summary, I only can say that this book is a helping tool for scholars, teachers, and citizens in general who might want to think about citizenship. I strongly recommend it not only to Scottish people, but from my Hungarian perspective, it will be useful to anyone from any nationality who is interested in this question.

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Not Under Bondage: Biblical Divorce for Abuse, Adultery and Desertion, Barbara Roberts, Victoria, Australia: Maschil Press, 2008, pp. 196, ISBN 978-0980355345. £11.95

This work requires to be approached remembering that it has evolved out of the author’s own life experience and the theological perspective of those who offered her the help, support, acceptance and understanding she required when she found herself embroiled in a marital relationship that had become dominated by abuse. This may have been in a culture different to that found in Scotland, but the situation in which the author found herself has no respect for national boundaries, and is perhaps more prevalent in all societies and cultures than is generally accepted. Although the theological perspective of this work is not in accord with that of this reviewer, it is recognised that it is a perspective that is increasing in the Christian Church worldwide, perhaps because in a world of ever-increasing uncertainty, human beings are looking for certainty rather than ambiguity.

This small monograph describes how Barbara Roberts found these texts could speak to her in the very difficult context of the abusive marital relationship in which she found herself. As such, this work, as the author herself suggests in the Introduction, could be of value to those who find themselves in similar circumstances, as well as to pastors ‘who seek to give biblical guidance on divorce and remarriage’. However, this reviewer would have to suggest that it would perhaps



be more helpful to pastors from a similar theological perspective. How this work could be used would depend on the theological perspectives of the people involved, and to what extent unresolved differences in their theological perspectives are a contributing factor to the breakdown of the relationship.

The structure of the contents page of this 190 page monograph is concise and well laid out. The headings express clearly the particular focus of each chapter: “Setting The Scene”, “Divorce and Remarriage”, “Clearing Away Misconceptions”, and “Jesus’ Teaching”. This should enable any user of the book, once read in totality, to find, through quick reference to the chapter headings, the sections relevant to specific individual circumstances that might arise in the course of their pastoral ministry.

In the Introduction, the author describes how she perceives the writings of the Old and New Testaments, and it is the statement, ‘without error and fully sufficient to guide us in all matters of life and practice’ that prompted the comments above. Indeed, the author herself in that same Introduction describes these writings as ‘a minefield’, noting several important consequences that require to be taken into consideration by anyone seeking the Word of God inherent in these texts. The questions she raises in what she describes as ‘the scriptural plight of the domestic abuse victim’ are pertinent and important, but her hermeneutic leaves little room for a more exploratory approach to Scripture, so that it would be difficult to relate the text to someone at a different place on their theological journey and in a different individual situation. By contrast, I would argue that the variety of voices in Scripture is that very characteristic that enables the Word of God to be revealed in all situations and to the diversity of humanity. One person’s ‘minefield’ can be another person’s answer!

It is not possible to undertake in one short review an overview of the whole text. However, there is one aspect that arises very early in the work that gives cause for concern because it suggests, despite the clarity of the index, that this author is still not clear about the objective of her work. It is Roberts’ suggestion that ‘if you are reading this book because we are interested in God’s guidance on divorce and remarriage, but are not particularly interested in the domestic abuse aspect, you may wish to skim through the first three chapters.’ (15)

This suggests a ‘moving of goal posts’. Is the objective of this work about the issues for a Christian of divorce and remarriage in general, or only in reference to marital abuse? Despite her inclusion of the more general aspect, her key context as described in the Introduction appears to be the specific. Does this work perhaps lose something by trying to meet too many objectives, both specific and general, in one volume?

To address satisfactorily the general aspect of divorce and remarriage in the Bible would require a work of much greater length. However, what is commendable in this work is first of all that it is short enough to be attractive to those seeking help, and secondly that it is a personal account of one person’s experience of a specific abusive marriage.

On the latter point, the first three chapters are crucial, because they represent the context in which the biblical texts are to be interpreted. If these chapters can be skimmed over, as the Introduction suggests, then why are they there? Their exclusion changes the context from reflection on the specific question of divorce and remarriage resulting from marital abuse, to the question of the credibility of divorce and remarriage for anyone who is Christian. The structure of the content works well for the former, but seems to become distorted for the latter. Why, if it is about divorce and remarriage in general, would Chapter Three, for example, become irrelevant? The author herself suggests that since the passage under discussion, 1 Corinthians 7, ‘does not give specific teaching about divorce for domestic abuse’, that ‘some Christians fall back on general principles of self-protection and covenant fidelity to justify divorce in such cases’. Yet, the author claims that the subject of this text, ‘divorce where a believer was married to an unbeliever is, despite surface appearances, the key text for divorce in domestic abuse.’ (37) Then, right at the start, in an apparently anonymous short comment on the author, the statement had appeared that she was ‘unaware that Christians should avoid marrying non-Christians’. (5) In offering this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7, Roberts is clearly reading her own situation into the text.

This admission throws the actual catalyst of this work completely open to question. Is the aim primarily to help those who find themselves in an abusive marriage? Alternatively, is it about the general

theological issues that arise when considering a Christian perspective on divorce and remarriage? Or a third possibility: is it about the problems potentially accompanying marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian, and therefore an argument against embarking on such a marriage? This confusion suggests that the author has not as yet fully worked out to her own satisfaction justification for her situation. This situation she sees as being contrary to the teachings in the biblical texts, but is in fact rooted in her erroneous reading of 1 Corinthians 7. The conclusion of her searchings seems to be that the reason for the marital abuse she suffered is because she had married an unbeliever!

It is unfortunate that the clarity of this work appears to have become clouded by attempts to make it relevant to a broader section of the Christian community. There is no doubt that domestic abuse is a vital specific issue in pastoral care, and there is room for some serious biblical theology on the matter. However, despite its confusion, this book could still function as a good resource to help people focus on an issue that is more prevalent in society than is acknowledged, and as such goes some way towards putting the issue of marital abuse into the public arena.

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