

DRAFT

For: "Introduction," to Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte, Jr., eds., *Sex, Marriage, and Family in the World Religions* (New York/London: Columbia University Press, 2006), xvi-xxix

Introduction

Social practices involving sex, marriage, and family are undergoing drastic changes throughout the world. These trends raise many questions. Are they real or superficial? Are these changes good, not so good, or positively bad for individuals, societies, and the world? If they are not so good or completely negative, is there anything that can be done to stop these trends and go in another direction? If what we have inherited from the past on sex, marriage and family needs to be reformed, will the religions that have carried many of our traditional views on these matters have anything to contribute to this process of reformation and reconstruction?

This book does not try to answer whether alterations in sex, marriage, and family are good or bad. Nor does it address what should be done. But it does have a central premise: *We cannot know how to assess these changes or how to think about the future if we do not understand the role of the world religions in shaping attitudes and policies toward sex, marriage, and family in the past. Can we really go forward if we are totally ignorant of the past? Can we constructively relate to these religious traditions if we are riddled with misunderstandings, false ideas about their teachings, and erroneous views about their complexities and nuances. Furthermore, many of the global conflicts that we face today – conflicts that break out in violent forms of hatred, terrorism, and self-defense -- are fueled*

by misunderstandings that people have about what their own religion and other religions teach about sex, marriage and family.

The editors of this volume believe that societies cannot form their future on sex, marriage, and family without at least consulting the traditions of the world religions on these matters. The human sciences of law, economics, medicine, psychology, and sociology cannot by themselves shape the future without knowing and listening to the heritage of the great world religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Furthermore, the peoples of the world cannot get along with each other, appreciate each other, or constructively critique each other without understanding more accurately how their respective traditions have shaped their faithful on these intimate subjects. The great public conflicts of our time are partially shaped by differences over who controls sexuality, who defines marriage, who shapes the family, and what actually constitutes a threat to inherited practices.

Modernization and Family Change and Conflict

During the last several decades, a momentous debate has swept across the world over the present health and future prospects of marriages and families. This debate has been especially intense in North America and Europe, but analogous debates have erupted in parts of Latin America, Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Middle East. These debates are about real issues. There are powerful trends affecting both advanced and underdeveloped countries. Some commentators believe these trends are changing marriages and families and

undermining their ability to perform customary tasks. These trends are often called the forces of modernization. Theories of modernization are now also being extended by theories of globalization. These processes are having consequences for families in all corners of the earth. Older industrial countries have the wealth to cushion the blows of this disruption, but some experts argue that family decline throws economically fragile countries into even deeper poverty and disarray.¹

To be sure, there are other sources of family disruption besides the forces of modernization and globalization. Wars, oppression, forced poverty, and discrimination between and among cultures and religions are additional factors. The recent massive family disruptions in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Rwanda, Iraq, and before that in Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and apartheid South Africa are still fresh on our minds. Sometimes the abstract yet disruptive forces of modernization get confused with the cultures and religions with which they have been associated historically. Does the West threaten the family codes of Islamic Shari'a? Or is it Christianity that is the threat to Islamic family law? Or is the real threat the modernizing process with which the West and Christianity are thought to be identified? Or further, is modernization really a threat to families anywhere, especially if wisely understood and appropriately restrained?

Who and what is a threat to a religion's family practices can be asked from a variety of angles. For instance, are the highly pro-family and pro-marriage traditions of not only Islam but also Confucianism and Hinduism a threat to the

¹ William Goode, *Changes in Divorce Patterns* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

Western companionate marriage and eventually to Western styles of modernization and democracy? Does a strong pro-family tradition have to be, by definition, patriarchal and oppressive to women or is it possible for a tradition to be both highly pro-marriage and pro-family and still be egalitarian on gender issues? Does marriage in a particular religious tradition have to include sex? Does it have to include children? What, in the first place, is marriage really for? Why are kin relations often, although not always, seen as so vital in several of the major world religions? Under what conditions, however, are kin attachments regarded as an obstacle to spiritual development within a particular religion? And do some religions, in complex and subtle ways, see marriage and family as both a threat to higher levels of spiritual fulfillment while, at the same time, subtly using persons who have attained these higher levels (monks, nuns, gurus) to reinforce and protect the more mundane marriages and families of less accomplished laity?

What are the conditions of divorce in a particular religion, and do women, as well as men, have the right to divorce? When, and for what reasons, is the practice of annulment used as a substitute for divorce? How were women's rights protected in the past, even in highly patriarchal religious traditions or in religions that practiced polygamy? Why did some religious traditions that practiced polygamy give it up, or at least modified the conditions under which it could be practiced? The questions are large in number and overwhelming in complexity. Yet, this volume gives insight -- sometimes very surprising insights -- into these and many other such matters. *And most important of all, we get to*

hear the answers to the questions straight from the central texts of these religious traditions themselves.

Most social scientists now acknowledge that modernization, independent of factors such as war, poverty, and terrorism, can by itself be disruptive to families in certain ways. But many distinguished social scientists believe that there is little that can be done to allay these ambiguous consequences. Others are more hopeful that positive steps can be taken. Yet those who are optimistic still quarrel as to whether the religions themselves should have a role to play in the normative clarification and, perhaps reconstruction, of sex, marriage, and family for the future. At the minimum, *the three editors of this volume believe that these religions -- all of them to varying degrees -- have vital roles to play in the dialogue about the meaning and norms of sex, marriage, and family for the societies of tomorrow.* Hence, it is our hope that this volume will serve as a vital resource for students and scholars, religious and political leaders, international and domestic officials alike as they engage in this dialogue.

The Plan of the Volume

This volume provides a number of the essential texts needed to start this dialogue about marriage and the family among the world's main religions and between them and the modern human sciences. We have assembled a group of highly respected and internationally recognized experts on each of these six major world religions. We have asked them to select and introduce the key texts of each tradition. We have invited them to view these axial traditions in their

genesis, exodus and leviticus—describing and documenting the origin, evolution, and institutionalization of their sexual, marital, and familial norms and habits. More specifically, we have asked them to assemble the basic texts – the ur texts, so to speak – that reveal the unfolding of these religions. These texts cover a variety of periods from antiquity to modern times.

These texts also represent several different genres through which religious traditions express themselves . These include classic canonical, theological, liturgical, legal, poetic, and prophetic statements on sex, marriage, and family drawn from the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. All of these religions tend to use all of these genres. The reader will notice, however, that some traditions use legal texts more than other genres while still other religions may rely heavily on stories and poetry. Some religions – such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam - have firm scriptural traditions while other traditions are carried by more loosely associated basic texts of various genres.

The chapter editors were asked to select texts for the various religions that addressed a number of common topics. Religions vary, however, in their directness in speaking to these issues. These topics include a) the purpose of sexuality, b) its relation to pleasure, procreation, and intimacy, c) the nature of family, d) the meaning, purpose, and institutionalization of marriage, e) gender roles in the family, f) the role of fathers, g) the nature of intergenerational obligations, and, when materials exist, h) the place of same-sex relations. At the same time, we hoped that editors would find texts that also would throw light on

sex, marriage, and family from the angle of the major stages of the life cycle (birth, childhood, adulthood, aging, and death) and from the perspective of the ritual patterns and meanings governing these transitions.

The Place of Religion in the World Dialogue About Marriage and the Family

The various religions can sometimes see each other as threats to their respective sex, marriage, and family traditions. Increasingly, as we saw above, sometimes the religions themselves view modernization as a threat as well. Modernization can be defined in a variety of ways. One view defines it as the spread of technical rationality into various spheres of life.² Technical rationality tends to reduce life to efficient means of attaining short-term and untested individual satisfactions. The American sociologist Alan Wolfe, building in the insights of the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, has argued that modernization viewed as the spread of technical rationality can function either in the service of market capitalism, as it does in countries such as the United States, or it can serve more bureaucratic state goals as it did in the Soviet Union and, to lesser degrees, even today countries such as Norway and Sweden.³ In either case, as Wolfe has convincingly argued, older patterns of mutual dependencies in families and marriage get transferred to the marketplace as in capitalism or to the state as in more socialist societies. In both cases, there is

² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 181; Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action I* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1981), 340-341.

³ Alan Wolfe, *Whose Keeper: Social Science and Moral Obligation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 52-60, 133-140.

likely to be more divorce, more births out of wedlock, later marriages, more nonmarriage, more cohabitation, and more general belief that marriage and family life are irrelevant to modern societies.⁴ Many scholars believe that along with these trends come more poverty for single mothers, more father absence, and for children and youth more crime, emotional difficulties, school problems, obesity, and nonmarital births.⁵

As a further perspective on modernization, English sociologist Anthony Giddens has argued that complex modern societies tend to differentiate their social systems into specialized and relatively autonomous sectors. This leads to social-system differentiations such as the separation between home and work, home and school, the social life of the young from parental supervision, the work life of spouses from the supervision of each other, and finally, the separation of the religious guidance from various sectors of society -- especially the sectors of sexuality and intimacy.⁶ In addition, modernization in the form of technical rationality, leads to more effective contraception, the pill, the automobile, and a huge array of reproductive technologies which can, especially in the United States, be used within or outside of marriage, by singles or by couples, and by

⁴ For summaries of studies and statistics supporting these claims on a comparative international basis, see Wolfe, *Whose Keeper*, 56-58; David Popenoe, *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988); David Popenoe, *Life without Father* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Linda Waite, ed., *The Ties that Bind: Perspective on Marriage and Cohabitation* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000).

⁵ For the specific effect of these trends on children, see Paul Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); see also the recent report distributed by the YMCA of the USA, Dartmouth Medical School, and the Institute for American Values, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003).

⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

heterosexuals or by gays.

The processes of modernization are generally thought to lead to many positive values most of us want to retain and enhance, for example, more control over the contingencies of life, better education, more wealth, better health, more equality for both males and females, and more freedom for nearly everyone. However, these same processes also threaten to undermine the power of religious traditions to shape and support family and marital solidarity. In turn, the religious traditions themselves feel threatened, and *in the process of defending themselves, they often end up attacking each other rather than the elusive processes of modernization and their extension into globalization. So, the question becomes, how do we learn to live with, appreciate, yet constrain and productively guide modernization in matters pertaining to sex, marriage, and family?*

This brings us back to our earlier question. What will be the grounds for guiding sex, marriage, and family in the future? Will we abandon the hope of any coherence in sexual and family norms — any common ideals around which modern societies will organize their goals in the sexual field? Will we turn to the human sciences (law, medicine, economics, sociology, and psychology) and them alone? *Or will the religions of the world be a part of the dialogue?* What will be the sources of the cultural work needed to find the guidelines for sex, marriage, and family?

Many perceptive commentators such as social scientists David Popenoe and James Q. Wilson feel that a new *cultural work* is required that will both

support and refashion the sexual and marital fields of life.⁷ But these scholars tend to by-pass the resources of the world religions in their list of resources of the future. Scholars in family law, family economics, family medicine, and family sociology tend to hold the same point of view, that is, that religions can no longer inform our normative social and cultural visions of sex, marriage, and family.

The exclusion of religion may be shortsighted. First, it seems to assume that religious teachings and practices are so diverse, so contradictory, and so incommensurate that they provide no common grounds for social reconstruction. This may not be true. The six religions illustrated below are not *identical* on issues pertaining to sex, marriage, and family. But they are *not completely different* or contradictory. There are positive *analogies* between them which may contain genuine wisdom and stable points of cooperation for social and cultural reconstruction. Second, the strategy that would exclude the voice of the religious traditions overlooks their complexity. For instance, each of the main axial religious traditions adopted and adapted some marital and family patterns from antecedent and analogous cultures. Furthermore, secular and religious institutions and authorities have often worked hand-in-hand in contributing to and enforcing the preferred sexual, marital, and familial norms and habits carried by these religious traditions. To say it more simply: *a sexual or family pattern carried by a religion may not have been narrowly religious in its origin*. Religious traditions almost always combine in subtle ways naturalistic, legal, moral, and metaphysical levels of thinking and reasoning. Just because an insight or pattern

⁷ David Popenoe, *Life without Father*, 196-201; James Q. Wilson, *The Problem of Marriage* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 207-221.

is wrapped in religion does not mean it was exclusively religious in its origin. Nonetheless, a good deal of the genesis, genius, and generativity of viable and lasting marriage and the family norms may lay in the teachings and practices of the axial religions of the world. These teachings and practices may just be something of the genetic code of what marriage and the family have been and can be.

Analogies and Differences

The texts included in this volume provide possible points on the map of these cultural genetic codes on sex, marriage, and the family. These codes differ in important ways, as you will see in reading these chapters, and they have accordingly produced various domestic patterns throughout the world. But there is more convergence than conflict in the teachings on sex, marriage, and family of the six axial world religions. Here are a few points of convergence that are worth considering:

First, each of these religious traditions confirms marriage as a vital and valuable institution and practice that lies at the heart of the family and at the foundation of broader society. To be sure, Confucianism and ancient Judaism permitted powerful men to have concubines. Christianity sometimes idealized the sexually abstinent marriage and, with Buddhism, commanded celibacy for some of its religious leaders. Islam permitted, sometimes encouraged, polygamous marriages, as did Judaism for a time and occasional Christian sects. All six traditions recognized that some adults were not physically, emotionally, or sexually suited for marriage at all. But all six religious traditions have long

celebrated marriage as a public and community-recognized contract and religious commitment to which the vast majority of adults within the community are naturally inclined and religiously called.

Second, each tradition recognizes that marriage has inherent goods that lie beyond the preferences of the couple. One fundamental good of marriage, emphasized by Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Confucianism is that the husband and wife complete each other; indeed, they are transformed through marriage into a new person – a new *one-flesh* reality. Another fundamental good of marriage is the procreation and nurture of children. Children are sacred gifts to a married couple who carry forth not only the family name, lineage, and property, but also the community's religion, culture, and language. All these religions thus see a close relation between marriage and children, just as they saw a close relation, although not an identity, between marriage and sexual expression. And all these religions teach that stable marriages and families are essential to the well being of children.

Third, each tradition regards marriage as a special form of promise, oath, or contract. Indeed, these traditions have often made provision for two contracts – betrothals or future promises to marry and spousals or present promises to marry -- with a mandatory waiting period between them. The point of this waiting period is to allow couples to weigh the depth and durability of their mutual love. It is also to invite others to weigh in on the maturity and compatibility of the couple, to offer them counsel and commodities, and to prepare for the celebration of their union and their life together thereafter.

Fourth, each tradition eventually came to insist that marriage depended in its essence on the mutual consent of the man and the woman. Even if the man and woman are represented by parents or guardians during the contract negotiation, their own consent is essential to the validity of their marriage. Jewish, Hindu, Confucian, and Muslim writers came to this insight early in the development of marriage. The Christian tradition reached this insight canonically only in the twelfth century, and Buddhism more recently still. All these traditions have long tolerated the practice of arranged marriages and child marriages, and this pattern persists among Hindus and Muslims today, even in diasporic communities. But the theory has always been that both the young man and the young woman reserved the right to dissent from the arrangement upon reaching the age of consent.

Fifth, each tradition emphasizes that persons are not free to marry just anyone. The divine and/or nature set a first limit to the freedom of marital contract. Parties cannot marry relatives by blood or marriage, nor marry parties of the same sex -- a tradition that is now being questioned in the liberal wing of some religions. Custom and culture set a second limit. The parties must be of suitable piety and modesty, of comparable social and economic status, and ideally (and, in some communities, indispensably) of the same faith and caste. The general law of contracts set a third limit. Both parties must have the capacity and freedom to enter contracts, and must follow proper contractual forms and ceremonies. Parents and guardians set a fourth limit. A valid marriage at least for minors requires the consent of both sets of parents or guardians -- and

sometimes as well the consent of political and/or spiritual authorities who stand in *loco parentis*.

Sixth, in most of these traditions marriage promises were accompanied by exchanges of property. The prospective husband gave to his fiancée (and, sometimes her father or family as well) a betrothal gift, sometimes a very elaborate and expensive gift. In some cultures, husbands followed this by giving a wedding gift to the wife. The wife, in turn, brought into the marriage her dowry, which was at minimum her basic living articles, sometimes a great deal more. These property exchanges were not an absolute condition to the validity of a marriage. But breach of a contract to deliver property in consideration of marriage could often result in dissolution at least of the engagement contract.

Seventh, each tradition developed marriage or wedding liturgies to celebrate the formation of a new marriage, and the blending of their two families. These could be extraordinary visual and verbal symphonies of prayers, oaths, songs, and blessings, sometimes followed by elaborate feasts. Other media complemented the liturgies -- the beautiful artwork, iconography, and religious language of the marriage contracts themselves, the elaborate rituals and etiquette of courtship, consent, and communal involvement in establishing the new household, the impressive production of poems, household manuals, and books of etiquette detailing the ethics of love, marriage, and parentage of a faithful religious believer. All these media, and the ample theological and didactic writings on them, helped to confirm and celebrate that marriage was at heart a religious practice -- in emulation of the leader of the faith (in the case of Islam), in

implementation of moral instruction (in the case of Confucianism and Buddhism), in obedience to divine commandments (in the cases of Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism).

Eighth, each tradition gave the husband (and sometimes the wife) standing before religious tribunals (or sometimes secular tribunals that implemented religious laws) to press for the vindication of their marital rights. The right to support, protection, sexual intercourse, and care for the couple's children were the most commonly litigated claims. But any number of other conjugal rights stipulated in the marriage contract or guaranteed by general religious law could be litigated. Included in all three traditions was the right of the parties to seek dissolution of the marriage on discovery of an absolute impediment to its validity (such as incest) or on grounds of a fundamental breach of the marriage commitment (such as adultery).

Ninth, each tradition emphasized family continuity and the strengths of kin altruism, albeit with different forms and emphases. Family continuity, legacy, and connections between ancestors and present and future generations were very pronounced in Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Confucianism. These came to particularly poignant expression in the burial and mourning rituals triggered by the deaths of parents, spouses, and children. Honor and exchange between the generations were emphasized as well, rendering intergenerational continuity and filial piety an enormously powerful welfare system with sacred sanction. Providing care and protection to needy children, parents, siblings, and even more extended family members were essential religious obligations in all six of these

traditions. Even in Buddhism, which saw the family as a distraction, and in Christianity, which often viewed marriage and family life as a competitor with the Kingdom of God, family continuity and mutual support were still emphasized.

Tenth, most of these traditions drew a distinction between natural and fictive families, though this varied in its articulation. In Buddhism and Christianity, monastic groups were also fictive families. In Christianity, congregations were fictive families. But even then, there were often complex ways in which fictive families reinforced natural families. For instance, Buddhist monks would intervene with a natural family's ancestors, praying for merit from ancestors to natural families - natural families that themselves supported the fictive family of the monastery in order to gain merit from monks and through them from their own ancestors. Although congregations could become fictive families in Christianity, they also generally included and reinforced the strength of the conjugal couple, their offspring, extended family, and households.

Eleventh, most of these religions reinforced intergenerational honor and obligations, but they differed in degree and manner of this reinforcement. Confucianism and Hinduism gave special emphasis to this value, and Buddhism, which inherited many of its family values from Hinduism, followed suit, even though it also saw family as a distraction from higher spiritual pursuits. Even though Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all emphasized honoring parents (father and mother), Christianity warned that family obligations could conflict with the will of God and the demands of the Kingdom.

Twelfth, these religions differ considerably on their respective views of

sexuality and the erotic. Although all of these religions see sexuality as a potentially unruly force in human affairs, all affirm its rightful place when guided by certain constraints. They all viewed marriage, with few exceptions, as one of the most important such constraints, though this was no substitute for personal sexual discipline. Within marriage, religions varied with regard to their appreciation for erotic enjoyment, with Islam and perhaps Hinduism being the most forthright in their affirmation, but Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism never completely losing an understanding of the role of mutual sexual satisfaction in marriage.

Thirteenth, each tradition kept an ample roll of sexual sins or crimes -- incest, bestiality, sodomy, rape, and pedophilia being the most commonly prohibited, with more variant treatment of concubinage, prostitution, and masturbation. A growing conflict in many religious communities today, particularly in North America and Western Europe, is whether to retain traditional prohibitions against homosexuality. Some denominations within western Christianity are now experimenting with the legitimization of same-sex unions, and comparable experiments are afoot in small segments of western communities of Judaism and Hinduism.

Fourteenth, each tradition draws a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children. Legitimate children are those born to a lawfully married couple. Illegitimate children are those born outside of lawful marriage -- products of adultery, fornication, concubinage, rape, incest, and in some communities products of illicit relations between parties of different castes, races, or religions.

Illegitimate children were historically stigmatized, sometimes severely, and formally precluded from holding or inheriting property, gaining various political, religious, or social positions, and attaining a variety of other public or private rights. In western societies, as well as in modern-day Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, and parts of southeast Asia, illegitimate children have gained constitutional protections and state welfare provisions, and have benefitted from the expansion of adoption. But in some Islamic, Hindu, and Confucian communities, illegitimate children and their mothers still suffer ample social stigmatization, and they are still sometimes sentenced to "honor killings" or mandatory abortions or infanticide.

Fifteenth, these traditions varied in their handling of sex, marriage, and family depending on whether they perceived themselves to be a majority or minority religion. Judaism since the diaspora has viewed itself as a minority religion, and this affected some of its perspectives on sexual issues, especially in contrast to the official views of the state or the dominant religion. Buddhism has seldom viewed itself as a dominant religion within a particular territory or state. On the other hand, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism have all perceived their traditions at various times to be dominant religions, and this has affected the range of issues in sex, marriage, and family that they addressed. As majorities, these groups have often looked to the state to implement their basic teaching on sex, marriage, and family. In the twentieth century, secularism, socialism, and pluralism alike have eroded these state-sanctioned religious understandings of marriage and family. In some

communities, such as Europe and Canada, dominant religious communities have largely acquiesced in these movements, or have had insufficient power to resist them. In other communities, such as Latin America, Russia, South Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, once dominant religious communities have developed their own internal religious legal systems to govern the marriage and family affairs of their own voluntary members.

Sixteenth, although the origins of Hinduism, Judaism, and Confucianism are obscure, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are more open to historical investigation. Early Christianity and Islam were more progressive in their treatment of gender issues, women, and children than later expressions of the religion, especially as it became more established by the state, closer to powerful political and economic interests, and therefore mirrored some of the hierarchical structures of empires, kings, and caliphs. Studying the origins of a religion is helpful in determining some of its basic impulses, directions, and resources on sex, marriage, and family. At the same time, religions do indeed complicate and mature as time passes. Understanding a religion from the perspective of its more complex later legal and philosophical developments, as in the case of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and later developments in Confucianism (neo-Confucianism) is crucial for understanding the wisdom of a religious tradition on sex, marriage, and family.

How and by Whom Should the Book be Used?

We envision this book as a basic textbook for courses in colleges,

universities, and professional schools. It should work for both undergraduates and graduates. The editors of this volume and of the various chapters are themselves classroom teachers and have a feel for what can work in that context. Of course, the text must be adapted, supplemented, and used selectively depending on the context and purpose of the class where it is used. In addition, the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University that supported the creation of this text hopes to provide other resources that will help professors and students carry the dialogue more directly into the twenty-first century.⁸

More specifically, we think this text can be used to teach comparative religion and history of religions. Most of the distinctive features of these religions can be discerned through the prism of their teachings on sex, marriage, and family. In addition, what the concepts, symbols, and teachings of these religions really meant can sometimes be seen with vivid clarity when viewed from the perspective of their implications for the sexual and familial field of meaning. This leads to a deeper and more concrete understanding of the religion itself.

But, as we have pointed out in this introduction, the field of sexuality is in

⁸ See, e.g., Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, et al., *Islamic Family in a Changing World: A Global Resource Book* (London: Zed Books, 2003); Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, eds., *Interreligious Marriage: Threat or Promise?* (forthcoming); Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *The Future of Shari'a* (forthcoming); Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to do About it* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003); Don S. Browning and David Clairmont, eds. *American Religions and the Family* (forthcoming); Michael J. Brody and Michael S. Berger, eds., *Marriage and Family I the Jewish Tradition* (forthcoming Rowman and Littlefield); Paul B. Courtright, *Dower and Divorce in Diapsora Hinduism* (forthcoming); Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope for Families in African-American Communities* (forthcoming); M. Christian Green, *Feminism, Fatherhood and Family Law* (forthcoming); Steven M. Tipton and John Witte, Jr., eds., *The Family in Interdisciplinary Perspective* (forthcoming); John Witte, Jr. and Eliza Ellison, eds., *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective* (forthcoming Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.); John Witte, Jr., *Ishamel's Bane: Illegitimacy Reconsidered* (forthcoming Cambridge University Press).

and of itself worth studying from the perspective of these religions. There is little doubt that defining and guiding sexuality in marriage, in family, and perhaps outside of marriage and family, will be one of the major preoccupations of the twenty-first century. As we have said above, we expect a grand cultural dialogue on these issues. We expect, and hope, that the great world religions will be a part of this dialogue.

We also believe that this text can be used in a variety of more specialized settings. We will list a few of them. We believe that academic programs in the sociology and psychology of the family should introduce courses using this resource. We believe that social work schools preparing students to work with families from increasingly more diverse religious and cultural backgrounds should offer such courses. The field of family law should help its students understand the family codes and legal rationalities within these religious traditions.

Psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and school counselors working with diverse families should know much of what is in the volume. For general understanding, for practical work with people, and for preparation for the emerging world dialogue on sex, marriage, and family, we recommend this volume as a resource.

