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Carlfred B. Broderick

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BOOK REVIEW
By Carlfred B. Broderick,* Ph.D.
of
HUMAN INTIMACY: ILLUSION AND REALITY
By Brown, Victor L., Jr.

The author makes it plain that this book is aimed at a
general audience. To this end Mormon bishops are code­
referenced as “religious lay leaders,” and a moving
tribute to President Kimball identifies him only as “one
well known man.” On the other hand, the Church has
sent every bishop and stake president in Canada and the
United States a copy of this book with an accompanying
letter suggesting that they will find it a helpful aid in
their counseling with members. Willy-nilly it thus takes
on the character of an approved and even authoritative
text.

Brown’s confessed objective is to persuade the reader
that the world’s version of exciting, impulsive, sensual,
sexual intimacy is based on illusion. The real treasures of
intimacy are reserved for those who are willing to invest
their whole selves in a comprehensive, committed, exclusive, benevolent relationship with a lifetime mate.
The author’s style is literate, compassionate and
persuasive. He enriches the rhetoric with clinical case
material, and quotes from the biographies and essays of
famous persons. He manages to avoid nearly all of the
cliches that numb.

Chapter 1 (The Illusions and Realities of Human
Intimacy) establishes the author’s premise crisply and
effectively. In a real sense the remainder of the book is
only an elaboration of this first statement. Illusions “deal
with fragments of human beings, not with whole human
beings,” “deny the consequences of human behavior”
and “deal in indulgence, not discipline.” By contrast, the
reality of intimacy deals with “risk and commitment”
(emphasis in original). The “increasingly subtle and
sophisticated pleasures of a secure long-term
relationship” are contrasted with “the monotonously
similar beginnings of repeated promiscuity.”

Chapter 2 (The Reality of Identity) seems less well
focused and less thoroughly worked out. The basic
premise seems to be that intimacy is only possible for
those who have achieved a sense of identity and identity
in turn is founded upon reliable, invested parenting.
This is, essentially, Erik Erikson’s model with its
pyramid of developmental tasks leading step by step
from the establishment of basic trust in infancy through
the adult stages of intimacy, generativity and integrity.
In my opinion, Brown could have strengthened the
chapter a great deal by explicitly tying his discussion to
this congenial and well recognized developmental
model.

In Chapter 3 (The Illusion of Stereotypes, The Reality
of Roles) Brown attempts to negotiate a difficult path.
On the one hand he wishes to make it perfectly clear that
he is free from irrational sexist stereotypes. On the
other hand he wants to leave no doubt that he stands
foursquare on the issue that God intended for men and
women to have distinct assignments in life. This is
treachery on the terrain these days and few of us are in a
position to criticize a bit of creative waffling as he
attempts to keep his balance in the transit.

Chapter 4 (The Illusion of Sexual Exploitation, The
Reality of Relationship Skills) seems to be the least
coherent and substantial in the book. Having made his
general point in Chapter 1 and his specific point in the
title of this chapter, he seems to have a hard time finding
enough on-target new material to flesh out the chapter.
Because of my own interest in this area I was particulary
disappointed in an opportunity lost. For example, at one
point in this chapter he addresses the issue of sexual
development in childhood and youth. His choice to set up
Freud as a Straw Man and compare the “illusion of
childhood sexuality” to the “reality” of an innocently
asexual childhood was, in my view, unfortunate. The
real reality is more complex and one can only hope that
at a future time he will treat the subject more helpfully.

Chapters 5 (Beginning Marriage: The Illusion of
Cohabitation, The Reality of Homebuilding) and 6
(Enduring Marriage: The Illusion of Eroticism, the
Reality of Complete Intimacy) plus the Afterword round
out the argument with further illustration and cases.
In our view, despite minor flaws, both the general
reader and the local Church leadership will find this
thoughtful book helpful. It sets forth the Christian view
on the place of sex in life as well as any source we know.

A partly annotated bibliography is helpful in leading
the reader to other writers in the field of Christian
marriage and related topics.

*Brother Broderick is Executive Director, Human
Relations Center, University of Southern California,
Los Angeles, California.