

INTAMS Colloquium 2008

What Future for Marriage in Postmodern Times? Perspectives from Social History, Ethics, and Theology

On 7 and 8 March 2007, the INTAMS Chair for the Study of Marriage & Spirituality at the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven organised a colloquium under the title "What Future for Marriage in Postmodern Times?: Perspectives from Social History, Ethics, and Theology".

Speakers

Stephanie Coontz:

Member of the Faculty (History & Women's Studies), The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA, USA. Author of *Marriage, a History* (selected as one of the best books of 2005 by the Washington Post), and numerous other books and articles on marriage and the family: *Contemporary Marriage in Historical Perspective*

Herman De Dijn:

Professor of Philosophy, K.U. Leuven. Chairman, European Centre for Ethics: *Why Marriage Matters Even in Postmodern Times*

Bernd Wannewetsch:

Lecturer in Ethics, University of Oxford, UK: *Ethical Reflections on Marriage in Postmodern Times*

Enda McDonagh:

Professor Em. of Moral Theology and Canon Law, Pontifical University Maynooth, Ireland. Founder of the InterChurch Association of Moral Theology. Founding Member of INTAMS: *Response to B. Wannewetsch*

Ralf Miggelbrink:

Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany: *Theological Perspectives on Marriage in Postmodern Times*

Herwi Rikhof:

Professor of Systematic Theology, Catholic Theological University Utrecht. Director of the Thomas Instituut, Utrecht. Founding Member of INTAMS: *Response to R. Miggelbrink*

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi:

INTAMS Chair for the Study of Marriage and Spirituality, Faculty of Theology, K.U. Leuven: *Moderator*

Theme

According to a common interpretation in social history, two main factors are to blame for the massive transformation marriage has undergone in Western societies during the modern era. Due to the processes of individualization and pluralization on the one hand, other arrangements have come in the place of an institution that traditionally used to regulate sexual behaviour, legitimize children, organize the division of labour between men and women and the transmission of property and resources to dependents. On the other hand, marriage has become more optional and more fragile since intimacy and romance became the prime considerations and love developed into its one and only prerequisite. Not only do spouses separate more easily once the ideal of the perfect love-match evaporates from their unions, but people increasingly opt for alternative forms of loving relationships instead of marriage.

Assuming that this development reached its apex at the close of the 20th century, one may wonder whether there is any significant role for marriage in postmodern times. Analysts still differ about whether modernity's dominant message about marriage has been one of inevitable decline and eventually total collapse, or whether marriage has after all adapted fairly well to the modernizing trends of the past three centuries. But even if it is true that modern marriage has compensated for its loss of relevance by what it has gained in terms of fairness, gender equality, and partnership satisfaction, the troubling objection is that alternative forms of life score equally high on these scales. So, if marriage is to survive as a specific life choice, what are its strengths and what would be its apparent and/or hidden potential on which to rely in the future?

The colloquium intends to explore persisting and newly emerging meanings of contemporary marriage. Perspectives will be sought from social history, ethics, and theology.

The contributions are published in Vol. 14/1 (Spring 2008).