

LEISURE

Text fits marriage class

Contemplating Marriage: A Reader, edited by Gloria Blanchfield Thomas; Sheed and Ward (Kansas City, Mo., 1995) 445 pp., \$19.95.

Reviewed by Peggy Weber
Catholic News Service

Often in a college class a professor will distribute "handouts," mimeographed articles that adds to the class discussion. In *Contemplating Marriage: A Reader*, Gloria Blanchfield Thomas, an associate professor of religious studies at Marymount College in Tarrytown, N.Y., has created a book that is a fine and cohesive series of handouts.

She has assembled more than 40 articles on marriage that could be used in a marriage course. The book is geared toward a college marriage course and for students who are "engaged or contemplating marriage."

The articles are divided into 12 chapters that focus on such concerns as expectations of marriage, spirituality in marriage, parenting and love, intimacy and sexual intimacy.

There is a healthy mix of topics and authors. The articles vary from scholarly works on "Marriage in the Old Testament" to first-person accounts of people who write "I Knew My Marriage Was a Sacrament When..."

Also available from the publisher is a companion journal to aid in personal reflection on what one has read.

The book is certainly comprehensive and covers a lot of ground. But it definitely needs the guidance of a class or a

discussion group in order to be appreciated. The introduction to the book is not to the reader but about "Teaching Marriage in a Catholic College."

The book is a fine component in a class on marriage. It could not stand alone. The editor recommends guest speakers and research topics to fill in some of the gaps.

She notes that such topics as alternative lifestyles, adoption, abortion, infertility and childless marriages are not addressed in this book. She also notes that the teacher must be a witness as one teaches the class.

"Much of the learning in this course is accomplished within the method itself..."

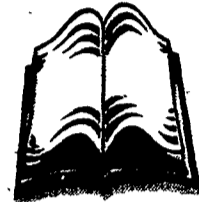
Interpreting one's experience, much reading and reflection and exposure to the wisdom of people in happy marriages and even those in failed marriages are essential components," she writes.

She notes that using this kind of method "requires great flexibility and is often messy." However, she adds that the method and the course do work.

They probably work because a teacher uses the best of this book, the best of speakers and the best of discussion to give students a thoughtful and informed view of marriage.

If one were just a pick this book up for a day's reading, it would leave one with an incomplete feeling. There are many wonderful articles, but they need a facilitator or a class or the journal to help one put it all into perspective.

Peggy Weber is a staff reporter and columnist for The Catholic Observer, newspaper of the Diocese of Springfield, Mass.



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