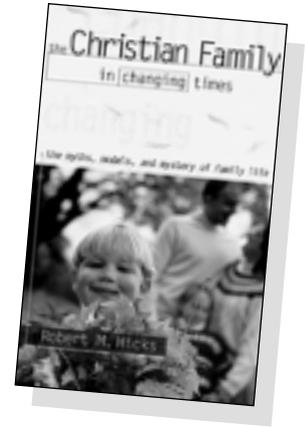


## BOOK REVIEW:

### THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN CHANGING TIMES



Reviewed by Carol Brisson Zechlin

In the last three decades, Christians have endured intensive teaching about the family — marriage and parenting seminars, books and tapes, even radio broadcasts and Web sites. Yet the more resources thrown at families, the more the family has eroded.

“Perhaps it’s time to rethink the evangelical sound byte we call the Christian family,” says Robert M. Hicks in “The Christian Family in Changing Times.”

Dr. Hicks asks some penetrating questions: When you think of the phrase “Christian family,” what comes to your mind? In your search for the ideal family, how do you picture it? Is your image a biblical expression or merely one you *believe* to be a biblical norm?

We all have an image of the “ideal” family that we seek, but much of this comes from our own family experiences. These experiences impart meaning where meaning may be lacking, according to Hicks. Scholarly literature calls this power “myth,” referring to something that provides significance or rationale instead of something that is not true. We all have these myths but usually aren’t aware of them.

Next to the power of personal experience, the greatest purveyors of myths about the family in other eras are television and movies. We have been strongly influenced to think that the ideal family was alive and well in different time periods, such as Victorian England and frontier America. Actual history debunks the notion that things were better in families in earlier times. In fact, three or four decades ago the Christian family was rarely mentioned at all in conjunction with the church or society in general.

Hicks goes on to disclose some of the common myths we adopt about the Christian family, such as

“Myth #1: Marriage Roles Are Determined by Gender,” “Myth #2: The Husband/Father Is the Head of the Home” and “Myth #5: The Christian Family Is Defined by Biologically or Legally Related People Living in the Same Domicile.”

Instead of focusing on roles (which is a word that doesn’t appear in the Bible), Hicks prefers to talk about biblical responsibilities. “A husband is to ‘love his wife as Christ loved the

church,’ ” he says. “But this clear command makes no statement about whether the husband should be the primary wage earner, do dishes, or change diapers.”

The balance of the book is given over to a survey of what the Old and New Testaments teach about families. Through his study, Hicks discovered principles and biblical responsibilities for healthy families that aren’t always emphasized by churches. For example, he found that the focus of the Bible is on the kingdom of God instead of the earthly family.

This book inspires us to hold our views about the Christian family against the light of God’s Word. Our family practices and beliefs might not be as “Christian” as we think. It also offers hope and encouragement for families who do not fit the traditional Christian family mold. I recommend this book for every bookshelf because of its sane and judicious conclusions about family living.

*Carol Zechlin splits her time between teaching piano and voice lessons and writing. She is currently working on a book about her growing-up days in Upper Michigan.*

#### The Christian Family in Changing Times

By Robert M. Hicks. 160 pages, Baker, 2002.

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