

Book Review

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Competent Christian Counseling, Vol. 1: Foundations and Practice of Compassionate Soul Care

edited by Timothy Clinton, Ed.D., L.P.C., L.M.F.T., and George Ohlschlager, J.D., L.C.S.W. WaterBrook Press, Colorado Springs, Colo., 2002, 813 pages, \$ 39.99.

In the span of one primary care office day, reality quickly teaches that many of our patients suffer from brokenness of heart and unfulfilled dreams, which adversely influence their health. When we efficiently address the presenting complaints and their physical manifestations, our patients are in no way freed from the root causes, such as past abuse, and their secondary issues, such as sexual dysfunction. I wondered if a text rooted in Christian counseling theory could serve primary care providers of all belief backgrounds who in their practices treat many needy, psychologically challenged patients.

Volume 1 of *Competent Christian Counseling* attempts to provide both the theories underlying Christian counseling and a practical introduction to their application in an encyclopedic format for primary care providers interested in a resource text. Composed of 33 chapters across 6 parts, an epilogue, select chapter notes, references, and a substantial subject index, this first volume serves as a mini-library for the topic. Addressing controversial issues in Christian counseling and showcasing practical applications is the theme of the forthcoming second volume. The executive editors serve also as contributing authors in nearly one third of the book's chapters, a significant contribution or influence, depending on one's perspective.

Primary care providers may find the first 2 parts of the book laboriously theological, but therein lies the biblical and spiritual foundation on which the practical application of the succeeding parts and chapters is built. The "Christian Counseling Relationship," the transition portion of the text (part 3), discusses the art of active listening, change confrontation, and a specific counseling ethical code, for example. The remaining parts comprise a practical guide for the primary care provider who must understand the perspective of the counselor and patient, as well as the roles that clergy and church laypersons may play in soul care. The remaining chapters are diverse, but focused, including, for example, discussions of solution-based brief therapy, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* system and the integration of spirituality into it, and multicultural counseling/special populations. The text closes with a contributing author's profile of the "good shepherd-counselor" in reflection of the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

The breadth of the volume is both a strength and a hindrance. In addition, non-Christians may tire of the repeated references

to Christian theology and may be suspicious of using the modifier *Christian* with *counseling*. However, the editors start from ground zero in establishing both a need for Christian counseling and a biblical basis for counseling. Bible-based professional ethics are stressed, and an ethics code for counselors is listed. Overall, perhaps the bio-psycho-social-spiritual life model is now the preferred descriptor for evaluation and treatment, since the DSM-IV now includes spiritual issues.

Because of the book's encyclopedic format, the user of this text benefits most by coming to it with a specific topical question or issue, for example, questions regarding specific psychosocial issues in African Americans or exercises in active listening for improving the counseling of teenagers. This text is particularly suited to family physicians and nurse practitioners, because it offers insights into counseling patients and families at any point along the life cycle and even across cultures. Many family physicians choose not to engage in patient counseling per se, but would utilize a reference text to refine their counseling expectations. The chapters on play therapy for traumatized children and sexual counseling, for example, can give a family physician an introductory knowledge base. Some family physicians utilize the "15-minute hour" approach to office counseling and would utilize this text more directly than the referring physician. The authors certainly include the family physician in their list of potential Christian counselors, but the text is written generically for Christian psychological counselors. These authors make a good case that Christian counseling is strong enough to stand independently as an approach to soul care and a ministry to the brokenness of patients, rather than as a tool for encouraging individuals to continue adherence to a particular set of beliefs.

Overall, *Competent Christian Counseling, Vol. 1: Foundations and Practice of Compassionate Soul Care* offers a theological background for the existence and utility of Christian counseling, plenty of illustrative case vignettes, acronyms for remembering counseling content, and an accessible reference in Christian counseling. Its audience easily includes all primary care providers, plus social workers, pastors, and laypersons. Encyclopedic and economical, it would rate a "buy" at "8" on a 10-point scale. Whether the reader comes from a Christian background or not, the volume enlightens one's theoretical perspective while offering practical insight into the process of Christian counseling.

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