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Book Review

Fundamental Pastoral Counseling

John R. Cavanagh, M.D.

Review by

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Priests and seminarians today stand in urgent need of books on pastoral counseling which have been written by psychiatrists possessed of the following qualifications: adequate professional training, orthodox religious views, and wide experience. The author of this book fulfills all these requirements to an eminent degree: he is an excellent psychiatrist, an exemplary Catholic, and his practice of his profession has been extensive. In addition he possesses the special distinction of having actually taught seminarians and counseled priests regarding psychic problems encountered in the sacred ministry. For these reasons one would have expected to reap a great deal from a book written on this subject by Dr. Cavanagh.

This reviewer must candidly avow that the work failed to measure up to his expectations. Despite the fact that it provides many useful bits of information and much sound clinical wisdom, the book is, in general, verbose and

repetitive, slackly organized and poorly edited. Even the title is misleading. A very small portion of the volume, certainly less than one-sixth of its pages, deals with pastoral counseling as such. The remainder contains material normally to be found in any introductory text of psychology and/or psychiatry, together with occasional practical applications suited to the needs of priests.

Admittedly, in undertaking to write a book on pastoral counseling, the author was venturing into a new and largely uncharted area. No one could fairly expect of him, therefore, a definitive exploration of the subject. One might have anticipated, however, a fuller explanation of the technics available to the priest in counseling. Likewise it is disappointing to find so little mention of referral, though it is a most important function of the priest engaged in pastoral work. The author promises that he will soon issue another book under the title *Clinical Problems in Pas-*

toral Counseling. It might be said that the inclusion, in this present volume, of case material and of more practical discussions of clinical problems in the pastoral field would have served to give the reader clearer ideas on the limits, purposes, and technics of pastoral counseling.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the topic of Client-Centered Therapy is presented in an extremely unfavorable light; while its chief spokesman, Carl Rogers, is subjected to far more criticism than he deserves. Such a negative treatment may well convince the average priest, unschooled in counseling theory and practice, that Client-Centered Therapy must be rejected out-of-hand, and thus preclude him from learning helpful elements of this approach. More balanced is the verdict of Fr. Charles Curran and others on this subject.

In Chapter 6, on the Counseling Situation, the treatment accorded Fr. Albert F. Grau, S.J., exhibits a similar bias. Here Fr. Grau's efforts to render morally tenable Rogers' idea of permissiveness and acceptance in counseling, even when the client openly says that he plans to perform an immoral act are held up to ridicule. This calls for the following observations:

Dr. Cavanagh is emphatic in maintaining that priests untrained in medicine should not meddle in cases where the deep unconscious is involved and somatic symptoms appear. The point is well taken. But it is conversely true that doctors unschooled in theology should

shy away from the task of solving thorny moral problems. The author quotes reputable moral theologians of the probabilist and equiprobabilist school to implement his attacks on Fr. Grau's evaluation of permissiveness. Is Dr. Cavanagh aware that his citations can be matched by citations from equally reputable moral theologians of the probabilist school — the school to which Fr. Grau belongs and on whose principles his arguments are based? As a matter of plain fact, Fr. Grau has advanced one plausible and acceptable solution of an extremely intricate moral problem — a solution which Fr. William Bier, S.J., the very competent editor of the Newsletter of the American Catholic Psychological Association, regarded as suitable for publication in that journal. No Catholic is obliged to accept Fr. Grau's solution, of course; but since his opinion is based on moral reasonings held in honor by the Church, it would seem that Catholics who differ with him are nevertheless obliged to treat his solution with courteous respect.

After voicing these criticisms, it is a pleasure to record that the final third of the book is quite satisfying. It contains good material on the Schools of Psychology and the Psychology of Personal Responsibility, together with a really excellent discussion of norms for the selection of candidates for the religious life.

To sum up, then: since the book provides much that is good, priests will clearly derive profit from

coming into contact with the thinking of this first-class psychiatrist; doctors will appreciate reading the last two chapters especially. It is unfortunate that the work was not tightened, reorganized, and couched in more acceptable scholarly language before publication. Had this been done, the book would be a more valuable contribution to a field urgently requiring

the wisdom and experience which the author undoubtedly possesses.

Fundamental Pastoral Counseling

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Bruce Publishing Company
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XIV 326 pages
\$6.00

DOCTOR

*God gave thee hands, to work for Him,
To aid the suffering, to mend a limb.
You share His power in all you do,
The suffering seek for aid from you.
How deep their trust,
How firm their faith!
Yes, Doctor, will my pain abate?
Your kindly presence in a room
Dispels despair and conquers gloom.
You share the power of God's own priest —
When counsel trusting patients seek.
You lend a willing ear to each,
You share the burdens of the weak.
Day and night at their call,
Giving to each your very all.
How deep His Love of "You" must be
To Lend His Healing Hands to Thee!*

A Friend