

Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 184 pp.

When I read Carrie Doehring's book, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, I was reminded of my undergraduate religious studies program, where one of my professors asked the class, "What is your personal theological foundation from which you will develop your ministerial direction?" He explained that one's theological foundation should be brief, memorized, and fit on a 3 x 5 in. flash card. Since that day, I have kept a mental index card in my head with the words "to care for all people" written across it in bold letters. This principle is based on text from the Qur'an, which describes caring for people as a religious duty. My theological foundation has shaped my identity as a Muslim American woman, how I relate to others, as well as my academic scholarship. It is from this perspective that I read *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*. The book is a comprehensive work that weaves theological and psychological principles into a fine paradigm for "caring for all people."

The author's model for pastoral care invites pastoral caregivers to view their ministry through what she calls, a "trifocal lens" that includes three approaches to knowledge: premodern, modern, and postmodern. The premodern lens assumes that God can be accessed through religious rituals, traditions, and spiritual experiences. The modern lens invites the use of rational and empirical knowledge, such as the social sciences, knowledge gained from the medical field, and biblical critical methods. The final postmodern lens brings into focus the contextual and provisional nature of knowledge, which includes knowledge of God (p. 2).

Doehring sees the first step in pastoral caregiving as listening to the careseeker's story with empathy and "imaginatively stepping into the shoes of another person and seeing the world from his or her perspective" (p. 18). This involves two simultaneous and opposite relational skills. She suggests that the caregiver connect with the careseeker by experiencing what it is like to be them, yet maintain separation by being aware of one's own feelings and thoughts (p. 18).

Doehring makes use of case studies and verbatims effectively throughout the book. She reviews the verbatims describing potential strengths and weaknesses in the interaction. Her book identifies alternative listening and communication skills, such as body language, manners of posing questions, paraphrasing, assessing the careseekers emotional state, and physical contact (p. 37-42). She describes communication enhancers for pastoral caregivers taken from the social sciences to facilitate better means of communicating with careseekers. The book offers a helpful outline on how to develop an ethical contract of care that includes specific denominations ethical guidelines, state laws regarding clergy as mandated reporters, confidentiality, sexual misconduct, and understanding one's limits as a care provider. The book also gives insight into how caregivers can recognize grief and assist careseekers in finding religious or spiritual practices that connect them with God (p. 72).

Once the caregiving relationship is established, Doehring suggests assessing the careseekers community of support, which includes family of origin, cultural and social identity, close friendships, and the people that careseekers live, work, and worship with (p. 97). Three important reasons are cited for this assessment. First, to determine whether the careseeker

lives in isolation or has a team of support that nurtures her psychological, physical, and spiritual health. Second, to determine how her personal narrative can transform her life by making sense out of what has happened. Third, in order for transformation to occur, it has to happen within the careseekers relational systems (p. 97).

Doehring addresses theological reflection, healing, and justice for the careseeker. She invites pastoral caregivers to assess the values of the careseeker and to notice whether the embedded theology is in line with the careseeker's worldview and religious tradition. Acknowledging the careseekers deliberative theology, the pastoral caregiver helps the careseeker find God in the midst of her crisis and her struggles to cope with life's challenges (p. 112–113). For example, Doehring uses the Hebrew stories of the exodus and the Christian symbol of the resurrection to express how God intervenes in human life to offer theological ways of understanding the process of empathy in pastoral care (p. 20). She concludes her trifocal model of pastoral care with a three-step plan of care towards healing. Her plan calls for attaining a sense of safety and trust between careseeker and pastoral caregiver, which allows for mourning and reconnecting the careseeker with her life (p. 133).

The one area of concern in the book is Doehring's discussion on the use of the terms "pastoral care" and "spiritual care." She writes that the term "pastoral care" often refers to Christian and Jewish religious traditions, which cannot be used to describe the care offered by Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu caregivers (p. 6). Although many institutions and organizations are now using the term "spiritual care," Doehring states labeling pastoral care as "spiritual care" risks the possibility of overlooking the richness and symbolism of a careseeker's religious rituals and traditions, which careseekers can draw on in times of crisis (p. 6, 7). As a Muslim, I prefer the term "spiritual care" because it promotes more inclusiveness. However, for quality caregivers who effectively use Doehring's trifocal model, whether care is classified as "pastoral" or "spiritual" should not undermine the quality of actual care given.

Carrie Doehring's book gives a thorough model for pastoral care using the trifocal lens of premodern, modern, and postmodern knowledge. The writing is clear and easy to follow. The case studies and verbatims are an added tool to help readers have a better understanding of how to implement the principles in the book. I found the book to be an insightful guide for my day-to-day interactions with grieving families in my work in hospice care, and in developing my scholarship in pastoral care. *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* will remain in my library as a valuable resource.

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