

ROBERT J. WICKS, *The Resilient Clinician* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 255 pp.

Within the guiding standards of professional associations that certify spiritual caregivers and educators in North America, members exhort themselves to demonstrate “emotional and spiritual maturity” (ACPE, Spiritual Care Collaborative), “attend to one’s own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being” (National Association of Catholic Chaplains, Association of Professional Chaplains, National Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC)), “manage our personal lives in a healthful fashion” (AAPC), pursue “a constructive practice of self-care” (NAJC, Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (CAPPE)), and set appropriate “boundaries between personal and professional life” (CAPPE, NAJC). These reflect much wise counsel, and yet sustaining a life and a career that fulfill the intent of these standards—while serving people in crisis-laden circumstances—can feel daunting and on occasion unattainable. A response to this dilemma is *The Resilient Clinician* by Robert Wicks, a professor of pastoral counseling at Loyola College in Maryland. His guiding question for clergy and other helping professionals is: “What do I need to put into place in my own life that will enable me to reap the most out of having the privilege to participate in such a noble profession and, in turn, experience a more meaningful personal life in the process?” (p. 10).

This question leads Wicks to explore issues of chronic and acute secondary stress (including burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder); how to nurture resiliency through an intentional and active self-care regimen; cultivating solitude, silence, and mindfulness in one’s interior life; and drawing upon the insights of positive psychology to balance the awareness we gain from facing our limitations and challenges. Throughout this almost pocket-sized text, he sprinkles many suggestions, pithy quotations, lists of questions, and provocative stories.

Wicks is neither a prophetic revolutionary, a poetic mythologizer, nor a folksy raconteur; his authorial stance is as a veteran colleague giving practical advice. Admirers of Thomas Moore or of Parker Palmer might find Wicks’s prose slightly lacking in inspiration, yet consistently he is clear, well-informed, and insightful. Further, his book provides seven appendices that are good self-diagnostic tools for assessing burnout and stress. He also includes two bibliographies which list numerous helpful resources but at times are overlapping and a little confusing.

After reading this book, I did not sense that Wicks had led me into undiscovered territory; rather, I perceived that he was reminding me (and himself) of truths we already knew or intuited. Beyond all of the helpful suggestions, Wicks’s voice is that of a fellow struggler who calls us to remember that we are not alone in our work. The struggles and rewards we encounter in our spiritual caregiving are known and shared by others. That reminder of presence is worth the cost of this book.

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