

## REVIEWS

Lynne Baab, *Nurturing Hope: Christian Pastoral Care in the 21st Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018. (192pp.) [ISBN: 9781506434278]

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*Nurturing Hope* is the first in a series of books published by Fortress Press which discuss Christian pastoral care in the modern era. Other books in the series address the practice of pastoral care in the face of specific issues such as unemployment, dementia, and the parenting of children with developmental issues. However, *Nurturing Hope* sits as a theoretical overview of pastoral care in general and offers a framework through which pastoral issues can be approached. Lynne Baab provides a valuable perspective on this topic, based on her own experience as a former Presbyterian Minister, and then Jack Somerville Lecturer in Pastoral Theology at the University of Otago.

Baab contends that the practice of pastoral care has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as both churches and societies have experienced various technological and cultural changes. This then serves as the basis for the rest of the book, as she goes on to outline seven “shifts” in pastoral care patterns, before offering four “skills” that modern pastoral carers can use, to become more effective at offering pastoral care to modern people. However, this justification is somewhat light, and is arguably the weakest part of the book. Baab primarily relies on anecdotes and her own experience in defining the social shift that she is responding to. Likewise, her reasons for choosing the seven shifts and four skills are not made obvious in this introductory chapter. While they are undoubtedly a result of something, most likely Baab’s own experience and research, this connection is not particularly clear.

Yet, the shifts themselves are compelling, each in their own way, and well defended by Baab. She begins by challenging what she sees as a dated model of pastoral care that constructs this practice as primarily occurring between a professional minister and a “troubled person.” This model also assumes that pastoral conversations are about issues of ultimate concern and cannot be about the more mundane facets of life. Baab finds this problematic, arguing that pastoral care can occur amidst more normal and regular life experiences. She also sees modern forms of pastoral care as having shifted into more group-based forms, involving laypeople. This is then explored in greater detail in the second chapter, where the idea of pastoral teams is explored. Here Baab is concerned about how the older model, combined with the organisational pressures faced by many professional ministers today, can lead to unnecessary burnout and stress amongst church leaders. There is also the risk of genuinely gifted and caring laypeople being underutilised within congregations that still apply the older model. A shift to team-based pastoral care is necessary today and has the potential to be a life-giving shift for both congregations and church leaders. Baab then provides some theological justification for this by reflecting on the relational nature of the Trinity and the way in which God can be present in human interaction. While these Trinitarian insights are also identified as a discrete

“shift” in pastoral care, they seem to be more of a “rediscovery,” and less of a direct contrast is made between these theological insights and previous pastoral practices which are now outmoded.

Baab then goes on to talk about pastoral care as needing to shift to a more missional, and multi-cultural, orientation. This is an honest reflection on the state of the church in much of the Western world, where declining levels of religiosity require the church to engage in a mission to members of its own neighbourhood. Increased levels of migration mean that many of these neighbours are likely different to “us.” Baab argues that pastoral care must extend beyond the four walls of the church and be offered to all, including those who are of different ethnicities and religions. She then, in her sixth “shift,” argues for the importance of pastoral care that is empowering. For Baab, “advice giving” is a problematic and limited approach to pastoral care, and she is keen to see it replaced with techniques that focus on reciprocity, independence, and encouraging constructive thinking. Finally, Baab argues that modern pastoral care should consider the web of relationships that surround an individual. This means not only an awareness of the ways in which friends and family can be involved in supporting an individual, but also a consideration of how one’s life and actions might interact with the natural environment, their local neighbourhood, and their economic context. Baab recognises that individual situations cannot be isolated from such contexts and communities, and argues that pastoral carers today need to consider how such connections might impact individuals, and what they can do to improve the nature of these connections.

The latter part of the book sees Baab focus on four “skills” that she deems important for modern pastoral carers to master. Here Baab’s expertise comes to the fore, and she draws upon some of her own previously published work as she elaborates on these various skills. The first of these skills Baab describes is an ability to understand stress, both one’s own and the stress of those within their care. The second is the skill of listening, a subject that Baab devoted an entire monograph to in 2014. The third skill is the carer’s own engagement with spiritual practices, both for their own nourishment and as a useful tool in pastoral care. Here too Baab works from her own vast level of knowledge about this subject. Finally, Baab’s fourth skill is what she terms “resilience,” although she admits that previously she would have addressed this same subject by talking about “preventing burnout.” Yet, Baab argues that the change of language is important, as it creates a more positive and constructive focus for carers and is less situated around attempting to eliminate a negative state of mind.

Overall, *Nurturing Hope* is the work of an experienced and knowledgeable writer who is more than able to offer meaningful insights into the state of pastoral care today. While she does not do as much as she could to justify the two frameworks she presents in this book, they each contain their own justification, as her points are well defended and the practical implications of each are outlined with clarity.