

The Bloomsbury Guide to Pastoral Care

Bernadette Flanagan and Sharon Thornton, eds. *The Bloomsbury Guide to Pastoral Care*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 230 pp. \$49.95. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781441125170.

What do we think when we see the word “guide”? Do we think about a map, or a set of instructions, or someone showing the way? And what does it mean for this book to be titled “Guide to Pastoral Care”? Do we expect it to show us the way or the lay of the land? These questions come to mind when I see the title of this book.

The Bloomsbury Guide to Pastoral Care provides a set of essays on a variety of topics in the area of pastoral care, both in Europe and in North America. The essays look at pastoral care in many areas. Some of these are, one might say, typical ministries such as working with families and the aging, but other topics discussed seem more contemporary, for example, cyberbullying and working with clients who are asylum seekers or are considering the use of reproductive technologies. By covering a wide variety of topics, this work shows that those engaged in pastoral care minister to a wide range of people who are walking through many different experiences.

The two essays at the beginning of each section provide some background and historical context to the European and North American practice of pastoral care. In the first essay, which introduces themes and trends in Europe, the author, Kevin Egan, provides a look at some terminology and then goes on to distinguish between pastoral care and pastoral counseling, which seems to be his primary focus. According to Egan, pastoral counseling has as its frame of reference the larger field of psychology, while pastoral care draws on the field of theology. For Egan it is essential not to forget the theological frame of reference; it is what sets those who practice pastoral care apart.

Egan also writes about the fields have developed differently as professions in Europe and North America. In Europe, the profession of those who practice pastoral care is part of the broader counseling profession, while practitioners in the United States have their own professional organization.

In the first essay of the second section, the authors provide a historical look at the field of pastoral care in the United States. This survey also shows the influence of psychology on pastoral care, and the authors call on those who practice pastoral care to find the treasures within their own traditions and fields.

These two introductory essays provide the reader with an overview of the field and a call back to the heart of pastoral care. The essays in between then offer the reader ways of providing pastoral care in a variety of settings. I do not know if the tension between the use of psychology and theology is as evident in these essays as the authors of the two introductory essays make it out to be. The authors of the essays in between seem to demonstrate how pastoral care providers use both theology and psychology in their practice.

As a case in point, in the essay on asylum seekers, the author suggests that these clients are navigating landscapes of loss, hopelessness, and despair. To me the author demonstrates the use of a theological mindset with an emphasis on best practices in counseling techniques to provide support to these clients. Some essays seem to emphasize the counseling aspects of pastoral care, but I do not think this takes away from the ideas presented. Best practices can be drawn from many areas. The essay about health care systems and how pastoral care practitioners help clients navigate choices provides a good balance. It describes the pastoral care provider helping to navigate health care decisions in light of denominational polity or religious beliefs and values, but the essay also provides tools from a more secular setting to help with decisions.

For this reader, this book demonstrates the value of both streams of pastoral care and pastoral counseling. I think the two introductory essays help to set a tone for focusing on the heart of pastoral care. They provide a good historical context for readers and practitioners working with clients as they think about a frame of reference for their work. I also feel the

other essays show the value of these two streams working together. As a guide, this book lays out a map for thinking about pastoral care and provides background and suggestions for what is at the heart of pastoral care. The essays dealing with specific issues then provide ways to work with clients and guide practitioners in their work. I feel this work is a good addition to the literature on pastoral care.

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