

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review of a Classic Text

David W. Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 405 pp.

Last year, David W. Augsburger, retired from Fuller Theological Seminary, where he had served as Senior Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling since 1990. Among Dr. Augsburger's 20 published books, none is more significant, nor been more influential than the 1986 volume, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*. Given the theme of this year's issue of *Reflective Practice*, I could not think of a more fitting classic text to review. The purpose of a book review of a classic text is to place the book in its historical context and to measure the book's lasting influence if any.

Reading *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* is not an easy assignment. It is a comprehensive, even encyclopedic volume packed tightly with all kinds of information, drawn from a wide variety of social sciences. In reading this book again, now nearly 30 years after its initial publication, I am struck with how much has changed and how much is the same.

The subject of counseling and cultural diversity has evolved, expanded and changed since 1986. The world has become more globalized and Christian missionaries today are not just going from the West to Third World nations, but going in all sorts of directions "across cultures." United States continues to become more culturally and religiously diverse, shifting the focus of cross cultural counseling, off of the counselor-counselee relationship and onto the bicultural family or racially mixed couple coming into the pastor's counseling door. And yet, the subject of counseling and cultural diversity is more important than ever and much of the information provided by Dr. Augsburger in 1986 is still relevant, helpful and provides an enduring conceptual framework for the ongoing discussions of this important subject.

Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures was a significant book in its time, a book which introduced Christian leaders to the dynamics of culture. Many of the concepts, issues, and insights which were new to us in 1986, have now become widely known and embraced among Christian professionals. In this

sense, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* is still an excellent treatment of the basic theories, concepts and issues in cultural diversity; still a good reference volume to have on one's library shelf.

Reading it again, I was impressed with how clearly organized it is, into 11 chapters and how each of those chapters is theologically grounded. It is a wonderful blend of scholarly material from the social sciences, peppered and illustrated by warm and heart-felt stories from around the world. It was a call to liberate, to liberate pastoral counseling from western culture. It was a call for pastoral counselors to become "intercultural" by nature, to become culturally capable counselors. That challenge is certainly as important today as it was in 1986.

Among the many concepts discussed in this volume that I still find helpful as conceptual background are: the tri-part dimensions of human existence: individual, cultural and the universal; the discussion of independence, dependence and interdependence; individual versus communal identities; models of dialogue; levels of cultural awareness; the interface of culture and theology; locus of control/locus of responsibility; moral development from a cross cultural perspective. Augsburg did not just report or summarize social science material, but offered some unique contributions and perspectives as well. His use of the term "interculture" was ahead of its time. It forecasted what was going to become a shift in terminology from "cross cultural," to "multicultural" and now to "counseling people from diverse cultures." His term, "interpathy" would signal an important correction or clarification to the over emphasis on empathy in the counseling literature of the day.

Let me highlight the discussion of the typology of societies as shame based cultures or guilt based cultures. Drawing on various scholars, Augsburg argued that this distinction was too simplistic and reductionistic. He argued that "shame, and guilt [and] also anxiety, the precursor to both, functions as controls in every society" (p. 121). Every culture has its unique and sometimes complex ways of balancing "inner controls and outer controls," the title of this chapter. This discussion is well worth revisiting again.

Finally, let me also highlight chapter 11, wherein Augsburg offers a list of metaphors from around the world that point to models of pastoral counseling. This expanded, multi cultural list of what pastoral care and counseling is, stands as a 21st century appendix to the classic *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* by William A. Clebsch and Charles F. Jaekle¹ and similar books that chronicled the history of pastoral care in western Christianity.

Rereading *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* also helped me reflect on the ways in which the discussion about pastoral counseling and cultural diversity has evolved since 1986. Let me share some of my reflections:

First, the world has continued to become more globalized and interdependent. The distinction between the West and Third World cultures which seems to underline *Pastoral Care Across Cultures* has given way to more complexity. There is a greater sense of mutuality and globalization among and in the wider Christian community. Christian missionaries are now going in all directions and across various cultural lines. The distinction between Western culture and non Western culture is not quite so simple and becoming less simple with each passing year.

Secondly, with the increased immigration from Third World nations to the United States and other Western cultures, the subject of counseling and cultural diversity has shifted its focus. It is no longer just something that happens "out there," when we cross national boundaries, but within our own nations and even within our local communities. There is a large body of literature on intercultural families and biracial or bicultural couples that did not exist in 1986. The boundary line between cultures has shifted from between counselor and congregant, which seemed to be the assumption in *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, to between spouses or between parents and children. Cultural diversity is lived out not just on the global stage, but in our living rooms, which brings me to my third point.

Since 1986, the role of acculturation has received more attention in the counseling literature. For example, not all Korean immigrants are part of the same culture. It depends in part on each person's level of acculturation to the host culture. There may be and often are significant cultural differences between first, second and third generation immigrants, within the same ethnic group. And of course, among Latino immigrants who may have originated from a variety of diverse countries and experienced their immigration process quite differently, there can be resulting in significant cultural differences within the same ethnic group.

Fourthly, *Pastoral Care Across Cultures* had a distinctive Christian flavor. It was written to and for Christians, particularly Christians involved in missionary work and particularly Christians from a more evangelical persuasion. Some of the discussion about counseling and cultural diversity has shifted, particularly among more progressive Christians, to an interfaith context. For example, increasingly in the United States, the term "pastoral

care" has been replaced with the term, "spiritual care" and a hospital "chaplain" is now a "spiritual care provider."

Fifthly, another development in the discussion of counseling and cultural diversity has been an increasingly stronger critique of the "dominant culture," and the damaging impact of psychological and cultural colonialism. A good example of this critique of Western culture is *A Peaceable Psychology* written by Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer.² Interestingly, like Augsburg, Dueck and Reimer write from the Anabaptist tradition and Dueck is a professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary. *Peaceable Psychology* does for the world of professional psychology what *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* tried to do for the world of pastoral counseling, some 25 years earlier. One of the differences between the two volumes is the noticeably sharper critique of western culture in *Peaceable Psychology*. Both volumes have together helped distinguished the gospel, or in the case of *Peaceable Psychology*, the profession of psychology, from Western culture.

So it has been an interesting experience, looking again at this 1986 classic, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*. It will be interesting to read David Augsburg's essay in this issue of *Reflective Practice* and hear how his thinking on this important topic has changed over the years. I for one, appreciate how much of the information provided in this volume is still relevant and helpful, particularly as conceptual background material. It also reminds me how the subject of counseling and cultural diversity has evolved in the last 28 years. The purpose of this book, to make pastors more culturally sensitive and competent must be an ongoing challenge for us all in the 21st century.

NOTES

- 1 William A. Clebsch and Charles F. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective: An Essay with Exhibits* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1964).
- 2 Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer, *A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009).

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