

Bernadette Flanagan and Sharon Thornton, eds., *The Bloomsbury Guide to Pastoral Care* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 218 pp.

The recently published *Bloomsbury Guide to Pastoral Care*, edited by Bernadette Flanagan and Sharon Thornton, is an important new work for anyone engaged in or instructing others in ministries of pastoral care and counseling. It is innovative not only in the issues addressed, those labeled as “frontier issues” by the editors, but also in the use of the narrative perspective, which was chosen “to reduce the gap between theory and practice of trust in Divine providence on life’s journey” (p. 1).

The authors of the various chapters speak from personal experience and their engagement with the emerging issues of the twenty-first century to offer insights into longstanding pastoral care concerns as well as those that have arisen in today’s new contexts. What they offer is easily accessible as well as scholarly, advancing the study of pastoral care in the twenty-first century in important ways. Each author, after establishing the context and issues with which they are concerned, identifies the pastoral care needs and best practices for ministering to individuals in the identified situations.

The book is divided into two equal parts that share historical overviews as well as wisdom from first the European and then the North American (mainly from the United States) perspectives. Many of the authors have ties to the educational institutions with which the editors are associated: All Hallows College of Dublin City University, Ireland; Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Newton Centre, Massachusetts; and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. These ties in no way limit the usefulness or scope of the work presented; rather, they point to the creative work in the field of pastoral care that is being done by those who work and study in these institutions. The topics addressed have global applicability and significance with the exception of the final chapter, which presents a new model for addressing the racial tensions that are unique to the context of the United States. Even so, the author of this final chapter offers ideas that can be helpful whenever peoples from different cultures come into conflict and need reconciliation.

The frontier issues identified in *The Bloomsbury Guide to Pastoral Care* are ones that have arisen in the context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Europe and North America. They cover such topics as

asylum seekers, mental health issues resulting from negative engagement with a cult or sect, cyberbullying, moral injury as a result of engaging in acts of war, multicultural identities, care of those seeking assisted reproductive technologies, and pastoral care in the aftermath of acts of terrorism or other major traumatic events. The additional chapters take on time-honored concepts with a fresh attempt to find new ways of seeing and understanding these issues in light of the current context. These chapters cover such concerns as equity for all, violence against women, family ministries, ethical health care, mental health, and aging. All of the topics in the book are examined in light of the twenty-first century to allow new insights to emerge around the needs of those facing such issues and how best to provide pastoral care to them.

While the narrative perspective employed in the book means that many of the chapters speak of concrete and therefore somewhat limited situations, each author offers up ideas that are useful in the practice of pastoral care in general. Using these situations as case studies, the reader is invited to glean insights that may be applicable in similar situations in other contexts. This is a practice with which many in the field of pastoral care are quite familiar. Perhaps this is the most useful aspect of this new work—the reminder that the best pastoral care practices are not universals that can be studied in isolation but instead are contextual, requiring the pastoral caregiver to listen and discern what issues are being presented and how best to address them.

The editors did an impressive job of gathering some of the greatest minds and practitioners in the field of pastoral care to reflect upon new and emerging areas of concern to be addressed by pastoral caregivers as we move further into the twenty-first century. The wisdom and perspectives they offer here will be useful as we navigate an ever-changing landscape in which to minister to those in need of care.

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