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Critical Caring: A Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology

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There is one small part of the chapter on Teenagers, Dating and Sex that has some merit. In it the author describes a part of her lectures to teens in which she graphs a progression of physical intimacy beginning at introductions and ending in sexual intercourse. After describing the progression in detail, she invites teens to decide for themselves where to "draw the line". Of course, she makes it clear that premarital (that is nonmarital) intercourse is off limits. She offers no other injunction about the limits. That, she says, is between the Holy Spirit and the individual. While this is good standard sexuality education, it is not unique to this author. Similar models can be seen in secular sexuality education material.

In short, there was little about this book to justify reading it. It tries to appear to offer a new and enlightened view of Christian Sexuality. What it serves to do is to underscore the belief that Christian Sexuality is one of the greatest oxymorons in the English Language.

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Critical Caring: a Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology

Valerie DeMarinis

Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

159 pp. \$22.00

The author writes a very careful introduction in which all the ground-rules for the book are contained. Whenever this happens in a book it is a challenge to the reader to see if all the expectations of the author are indeed fulfilled in the writing.

The author writes for four reasons. 1. "It is important to articulate those struggles and challenges as a natural but never easily experienced part of the work we do." 2. "To offer a working model of Critical Caring for pastoral psychotherapy. This model is not meant as a solution to anything but rather an invitation to those in pastoral psychology and related fields of concern to do their own investigation and articulation of what pastoral psychology is and does." 3. "The time is appropriate for those working in or related to the field to communicate new ideas, theories, methodologies, and questions." and 4. "I want to share the life stories and clinical journeys of persons who have been faced with situations that challenged their ability to care at the deepest levels and who found creative and courageous ways to use their diversified expressions of belief and trust to find realistic strategies for hope and movement."

The author is concerned for understanding and defines terms which will be used in her writing. She wants particularly that the terms "religion", "symbol", and "feminist" be clearly understood. It is in light of

the "feminist" dimension that she has selected the case studies of the later chapters of the book. She illustrates her definition of "pastoral psychology" as the "umbrella field for the therapeutic process of Critical Caring" which includes "pastoral care", "pastoral counselling", and "pastoral psychotherapy". DeMarinis writes, "Pastoral psychology has the unduplicated therapeutic position and access for exploring the ways in which and means by which beliefs and symbols can help with or hinder the process of Critical Caring, and for actively using these beliefs and symbols in the therapeutic context." She also identifies the assumptions with which she works as a Psychotherapist. This brings her to the place where it is important to explain the descriptor "Critical" for the word "Caring" which she says is there "to distinguish health-producing caring from illness-producing caring—within a cultural and community context of meaning-making".

The background and context for the book are derived from the author's experiences, and the word "Scavenger" best describes the way by which she comes to her model for caring. Her definition here is vital to the understanding of the book, and I select this set of words as the kernel of truth which makes this book a wonderful addition to the understanding of a very important field of endeavor for the parish pastor, the counsellor or the therapist. DeMarinis writes: "The responsible scavenger can identify, discriminate between, and through wisdom and flexibility, transform disparate kinds of knowledge into wisdom. I can think of no more precious tool than wisdom for those working in pastoral psychology. And since the image of the responsible scavenger connotes wisdom, it seems a worthy image for the field."

Since the author describes Critical Caring as a feminist model, she also defines it for us. She finds that there are four reasons why feminist theology and psychosocial theory can be used as a foundation for a model of Critical Caring for pastoral psychology. These are: nurture, wisdom derived from challenging existing perceptions, understanding that religious belief and spirituality must take responsibility for their role in psychosocial pathology and illness, and a praxis methodology which demands that action and reflection work in tandem.

The book is divided into two parts, first the hermeneutical and theoretical, and secondly the clinical application. It is well worth reading and studying. I think that Valerie DeMarinis fulfilled the task she set for herself in an admirable way. There are many who need to "scavenge" through this material to find the wisdom that it offers. I took it along to read on holiday, and once started I could not put it down.

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