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Introduction to Psychology and Counseling (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by Russell Maatman

Introduction to Psychology and Counseling, Paul D. Meier, Frank B. Minirth, and Frank Wichern, Baker Book House, 1982. 433 pages. \$19.95. Reviewed by Ken Bussema, Associate Professor of Psychology.

Recognizing the dramatic growth in interest and study in psychology and counseling among Evangelicals, while sensing a scarcity of competent textbooks written from a Christian perspective, Drs. Meier, Minirth, and Wichern have written a text to help fill this gap. The authors' stated purpose is "to set forth Christian perspectives and applications for students who expect to become counselors" (p. 22). Thus their introduction to psychology is admittedly sketchy, with their primary focus on Christian counseling applications. The authors attempt to accomplish this task by offering five major sections of material. Part One deals with what the authors refer to as the "meaning of wholeness" or "normal psychology" including basic topics such as learning, motivation, and perception. In the second part, the authors present material on psychological development including a discussion of spiritual development. Part Three covers abnormal psychology with a heavy psychodynamic emphasis. This section offers an interesting chapter on defense mechanisms and more thorough coverage of personality disorders than is found in many texts. Christian counseling is the focus of Part Four, with a discussion of the characteristics of Christian counseling and a cursory overview of "secular" theories of counseling. In the final section, entitled "Helping Families Grow," a brief descriptive overview of healthy family functioning and marital-premarital counseling is provided.

As can be seen by the topics addressed in this book, the authors have taken on an ambitious project. Unfortunately they do not deliver a text that can really fill the gap. Perhaps in attempting to cover too much ground or in thinking that only a sketchy overview of psychology was necessary, they treat most topics too simplistically, incompletely, and uncritically. Even allowing for the authors' focus on counseling, the authors' own definition of counseling, namely, "Christian Counseling may be broadly defined as a relationship in which one individual by virtue of both spiritual and psychological insights, seeks to help another individual recognize, understand, and solve his or her own problems in accordance with the Word of God," demands greater psychological sophistication than the text provides. Parts one and two do not do justice to the complexity, con-

trovery, and importance of topics such as learning, emotion, or motivation. The chapters on development read more like a guide for parenting than a critical discussion of developmental psychology. And perhaps the most frustrating and limiting aspect of the book as a textbook is the inadequate documentation of reference and supportive sources. Throughout the text, statements such as "studies have shown" or "it was found" are made without any indication as to which studies or theories they are referring. The basis for the authors' selection of material is neither explained nor justified.

As the reader moves on to Part Three, abnormal psychology, the coverage improves significantly; however, the documentation problems persist. I found the chapter (18) on defense mechanisms insightful, and the model presented of the basic causes of psychological problems very useful. The discussions of personality disorders and depression are the most thorough of all the material in the text. Throughout this section the authors appear to work from a psychodynamic perspective; however, this perspective is never acknowledged or critically justified. Such a discussion would have been a valuable addition to this text.

The final sections deal specifically with counseling. Most of the material presented is descriptive in nature, with numerous lists depicting the Christian counselor or guidelines for healthy families. Although I would agree with most of the descriptions presented, little new information or insights are presented. The topics of counseling theory and strategies are not treated in any systematic fashion.

Meier, Minirth, and Wichern took on an ambitious project and their efforts and dedication are appreciated. However, *Introduction for Psychology and Counseling* seems to be of limited value within an academic context. Perhaps the most valuable contribution this text makes is that it provides the Christian author with a concrete example of what an introductory textbook can or should do. Although at times the authors' attempts at developing a Christian perspective rested primarily on offering biblical examples of psychological principles, they offer some insights into how a much-needed Christian view of man in psychology might be developed.