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Counseling: A Guide to Helping Others R. Lanier Britsch and Terrance D. Olson

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Book Review

R. LANIER BRITSCH and TERRANCE D. OLSON. *Counseling: A Guide to Helping Others*. Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983. xi + 238 pp. \$8.95

Reviewed by Jodine J. Wood, executive director, Broderick and Wood, Marriage and Family Counseling, Inc., Cypress, California.

This book contains twenty-one chapters, each written by separate authors. Its purpose, as stated in the preface, is "to explain in layman's language some of the shared wisdom of the specialists regarding a number of life's most serious and vexing problems" (x). The various authors "have attempted to show lay counselors a number of gospel-oriented solutions to human problems" (xi). These are ambitious goals!

The first defines the role of the lay counselor. It indicates the necessity for preparation of the counselor and makes a clear statement as to when appropriate professional referrals are necessary. This is essential for those who take on the role of counselor, as they share the burden of helping and nurturing those who have problems.

Gospel-oriented solutions abound in every chapter. The "how to" lists are helpful and profuse. The discussion of crisis intervention is particularly helpful on understanding the crisis and using appropriate resources. The chapter on counseling couples makes the excellent point that the responsibility for the healing of a marriage should be placed on the couple's shoulders. The chapter on depression has an adequate discussion of the emotional, cognitional, motivational, and physical facets, and includes a wonderful quote from Abraham Lincoln describing how depression feels. The chapter on children and discipline is outstanding. It makes the excellent point that we should use spiritual power instead of secular power in the process of discipline, not to control but to teach through acts of love.

There are many strengths in the book, but in my opinion there are also some serious omissions. With all the research that has been done on the biochemical component of depression, it was disappointing to have this facet neglected. In the chapter entitled "Depression," David G. Weight indicates that grieving for the loss of a loved one will produce short-term depression. In my experience this just has not been true. Working through a major loss often takes up to a year to

resolve. I also disagree with the claim that those who lose a marriage partner through death experience emotions similar to those who lose a partner through divorce. My experience indicates that the emotional upheaval is much worse in divorce because of the rejection and failure components involved.

In counseling couples, a major component is joining the couple (letting them know you care and that you understand each of them). According to Carlfred Broderick, achieving this triangular rapport among each member of the couple and the counselor is the most crucial task when beginning counseling with a couple. Yet this is not addressed at all in the volume. If it is not possible to have the couple attend counseling sessions together, it is still possible to work on the marriage relationship. Contrary to statements in the chapter, "Counseling Couples," James Framo rightly teaches that you work with whoever you can get.

The book's instruction on assessing the suicide potential is inadequate. The most critical factors in determining the probability of a suicide attempt are:

- (1) Has the person attempted suicide before?
- (2) Does he/she have a plan?
- (3) Does he/she have the means to carry out the plan?

The more lethal the method the person has in mind, the greater the likelihood the suicide will succeed if attempted. But the lethality of the method does not necessarily have a bearing on the likelihood that suicide will be attempted.

The responsibilities of the counselor, as outlined in this book, seem heavy, even to a professional. According to R. Lanier Britsch, "counselors are responsible to advise behavior changes to solve problems" (13). This premise of one theoretical school is not shared by all professionals and seems, to this reviewer, to be ill-advised and overburdening for the lay counselor. Later on in the same chapter, the lay counselor is instructed that the best help for those who sorrow and grieve because of the iniquities of other men is to remind them of the positive side of life. I have never gotten to first base with someone in sorrow by reminding him of the positive side of life.

There is a great need for a book of this kind: explaining in layman's language the wisdom of the specialists. Perhaps the next volume will cover fewer subjects in greater depth and with more specialists' wisdom.