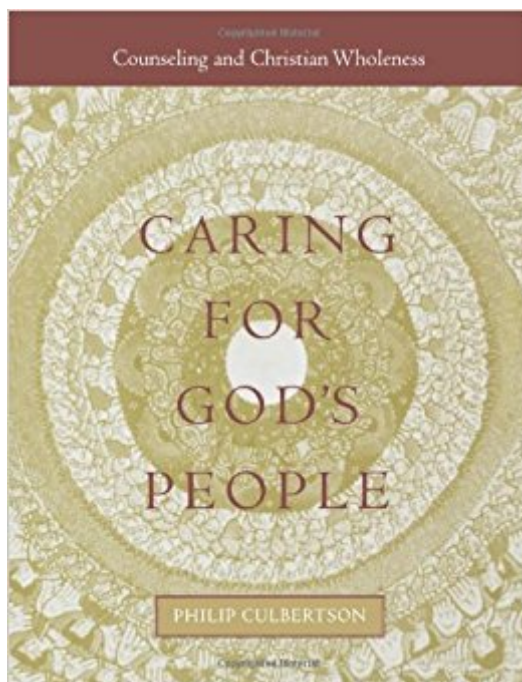


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# Caring For God's People (Integrating Spirituality Into Pastoral Counseling)



## Synopsis

Culbertson has built his text around the ideal of Christian wholeness and maturity—a healthy interconnectedness of self-within-community. The heart of the book lies in its presentation of the three schools of counseling theory that Culbertson finds most helpful: family systems theory, narrative counseling theory, and object relations theory. Each of these is explained in detail, and then applied to the most common and challenging of counseling situations: pre-marital counseling, marriage counseling, divorce counseling, counseling gay men and women, and grief counseling. Culbertson brings new sensitivities to the counseling scene—a more nuanced grasp of gender, a new sense of families, issues of sexual orientation, a strong sense of the relationship of emotions to spirituality, an empathetic attitude, a pragmatic but professional mix of ancillary theories, and a sense of the relevance of the counselor's own self-understanding.

## Book Information

Series: Integrating Spirituality Into Pastoral Counseling

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## Customer Reviews

Philip Culbertson, an Episcopal priest for more than twenty-seven years, teaches pastoral care and counseling at St. John's Theological College in New Zealand.

Well written and logically organized for a learning environment. There don't seem to be a lot of wasted words or unnecessary information. Packed with theories and application techniques for those interested in pastoral care and faith based therapy.

It was good

"Going into ministry without understanding how people work and how they relate to each other is like going into the dense forest with a blindfold on: you're bound to get hurt." (From the conclusion of "Caring for God's People"). In writing "Caring for God's People" Philip Culbertson has produced a pastoral text that practices what many others have preached but not undertaken - to offer an integrated approach in pastoral caregiving that involves strong theoretical backing, practical information, and serious consideration of contextual issues within any pastoral relationship. Culbertson divides this text into three sections. The first offers detailed overviews of three psychological theories he identifies as offering deep insight into the task of pastoral caring. The three approaches identified within this section are: Family Systems Theory, Narrative Counselling theory, and Object Relations Theory. Giving a full chapter to each of these approaches, Culbertson provides a detailed but accessible overview, offering specific strengths of each for use in pastoral praxis. He takes care to point to links the approaches have with one another and wider theoretical understandings, thus encouraging the reader to critically assess how they overlap and compliment one another. Culbertson takes care to identify his own biases and cultural context (as an American working within a South Pacific Setting) and at various points explores cultural considerations that should be taken into account before any of these approaches are simply "applied" to any given context. This is a useful reminder for those of us in pastoral ministry to always be aware of how the models and approaches we take for granted in our own context may (or may not) apply in other contexts. The second section of the book is entitled "The Application" and its five chapters focus on various applications of the theoretical approaches discussed in common pastoral situations - pre-marriage, marriage, and divorce counselling, counselling with gay and lesbian persons, and working with "those who mourn". It is this second section that distinguishes "Caring for God's People" from that vast majority of other pastoral texts. For Culbertson demonstrates the application of the theoretical material in very concrete and specific ways. This application is made more accessible through the inclusion of material in each chapter that relates to issues and understandings of each pastoral context. In the chapter dealing with premarital counselling for example Culbertson outlines a framework for premarital counselling including a time-frame, likely issues to arise, and details relating to the service and liturgy itself that the minister may consider. It is this level of intergration of the practical and theoretical (and the integration of more than one theoretical model) that sets this text apart for others offering a purely theoretical or purely practical

focus. This degree of integration is evidenced throughout section two of the book, and culminates in section three which is entitled "Staying Safe in Ministry". Here Culbertson focuses on issues relating to the personal and practicing safety of clergy and pastoral caregivers, examining topics such as referral and understanding the nature of different forms of counselling, the role and nature of supervision, and (in what I consider to be the best chapter of the book) the central importance of pastoral congruence and self-awareness in ministry practice. The particular strength of this text lies in Culbertson's ability to offer an overview to theoretical approaches and specific areas of pastoral activity that are not only readily accessible to those new to the topics, but also provide enough depth to offer challenges and new awareness for those already familiar with aspects of the material presented. In particular, the careful layering and integration of material offers many points of contact for the reader, in a tangible way, to understand the premise of Culbertson's main argument: that things happen best when carefully and appropriately integrated - be that the approach taken to a particular issue, or the very being of the pastoral caregiver him or herself. In a text such as this it is impossible to include everything. I would have liked to see a chapter in section two relating to pastoral care with those living with mental illness within the community - in my own practice I have found this to be one of the key pastoral issues I find within the community I am stationed. I would also have found helpful some coverage of criticisms of the theoretical approaches discussed. I am impressed with this book which I see as an invaluable contribution to texts for those exploring or teaching in the field of pastoral theology. Culbertson is to be congratulated on this work which seems likely to become a key text in the field. We have long been overdue for a text that takes the integration of theory, practice, and practitioner seriously. Culbertson has provided a text that does that clearly and well. Craig Forbes

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