

**Reflections On**  
**An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling**

**PM 804 Pastoral Counseling**  
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## **I. How does this reading ring true to your experience and ministry?**

Though this book was written in 1959, I was encouraged throughout its pages as various authors contributed to this introduction to pastoral counseling. This writer saw relevant themes such as “Before her pride and narrow mindedness had constricted these channels through which love must flow” and “The pastoral counselor assumes that if he is working for a Christian objective in a Christ-like manner, the Spirit of God will fill out that which is lacking to complete the work” (Oates, 31 & 209). These are topics, in my experience and the experience of men such as Dr. Terry Wardle that are important to pastoral counseling today. Dr. Wardle speaks of the “debris of sin blocking the flow of the Holy Spirit” and the importance for the caregiver to “learn to recognize and respond to the presence of the Holy Spirit in a counseling setting” (Wardle, 102 & 107). While Dr. Wardle deals more directly with traditional counseling, Dr. Oates and his team have written this book specifically as a pastoral tool for those involved in ministry.

Because of my distinct calling to pastoral ministry, I found this work to be extremely helpful in setting practical guidelines for pastoral counseling. One such item is the importance of viewing the appointment itself as a counseling tool (Oates, 101). By keeping regular hours and setting up conferences by appointment (Oates, 98), the pastor can do an appropriate job of following the guidelines of Acts 6:1-4, “and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). For there to be appropriate time for counseling and also the study of scripture and administration of the church, pastors need to work with other counselors. Dr. Oates and his team deliver some very good advice on the referral process that I found extremely helpful. First, do not refer the person away from yourself and your ministry. Secondly, a referral must be reciprocal and lastly, most congregation members are

not aware of the professionals and institutions available in their community (Oates, 170).

These guidelines are appropriate to allow the pastor to meet the “requirements of God and the demands of the congregation” which at times create tension in ministry (Oates, 33).

## **II. How does this reading challenge you or raise concerns for you?**

Through this reading I was challenged in three major areas of my life. The first is the importance of keeping what Dr. Oates describes as “informal Pastoral relationships” (Oates, 69). It is true that we “become so professional that we forget the importance of casual relationships” (Oates, 71). One cannot simply sit in their office and wait for others to seek him for counsel; there is value in remembering a valuable place for ministry is within the marketplace.

A second area in which I was challenged was the importance of keeping confidences within the counseling ministry of the church. Dr. Oates describes this as the “Radioactive” character of the pastor (Oates, 87). The term “fallout” is used to describe the serious nature of the damage to community that can occur if any level of confidence is broken. There are five suggestions provided to assist pastors in guarding confidences (Oates, 88):

- Prepare messages thoroughly
- Always get permission
- Use illustrations from literature, plays, poetry and the Bible when possible
- Remember that preaching is not a counseling session
- Remember that preaching should encourage people to develop confidence in a pastor as a counselor

A third challenge I found in this reading was the importance of utilizing scripture appropriately in Christian counseling. Dr. Oates describes using the Bible as a lever to coerce others onto a specific position much like waving it around as a wand of authority (Oates, 223). Our classroom example of the “Buttermilk” experiment (of which I was a part) helped

me to comprehend the disastrous effect that this utilization of scripture could have on others.

Every Christian counselor should consider these words (Oates, 250):

“Bring the sacred things of God to the human situation of His people with reverence for their personalities and assurance of God’s concern.”

One concern that I had through the reading of this text was the full extent of Christian counseling for the pastor.

“Pastoral counseling is in deed and in truth a form of the ministry of the word of God in Christ. The communication of the gospel, the experience of prayer, the interpretation of scripture and the exposition of Christian doctrine all permeate the practice of pastoral counseling” (Oates, 202).

For anyone entering pastoral ministry and reading this text as an introduction, the need for continued study in the art of being a counselor should become an area of priority in their lives.

### **III. How might you apply the understanding / insights from this reading to your life and ministry?**

There are two major ways in which I will seek to apply insights gained from this text into my life and ministry. The first is to remember that “The minister’s own personal relationship to Christ provides an immediate source of authority as a trained person and the man called to lead this congregation” (Oates, 33). This understanding paves the way for the “pre-counseling” visit as a means of ventilation and preparation for future counseling opportunities (Oates, 85) and determines the pastor’s “attitude” or readiness to act (Oates, 56) as he determines the objectives, methods and motives of his approach to counseling (Oates, 64).

The second way I will seek to apply insights gained from this text into my life and ministry is to fight against the individualistic nature of pastoral counseling and remember that we are called to community and must rely on both God and others (Oates, 37). As “The Holy Spirit becomes the power who creates communion” (Oates, 211), we are called to promote

“congregational maturity” (Oates, 82). While some may view the Baxter model of counseling and pastoral care as “self centered” and “Narcissistic” with the pastor doing “most of the ministry that matters” (Hunter, 106), I found through this text that the Baxter model (Oates, 12) ties together the administration of the church and its counseling practices as an inseparable unit. “In counseling, people can measure the understanding of the church against their own misunderstanding of its purpose” (Oates, 30). “The more the pastor does the work of the counselor the more he moves out of the “additive” and into the “multiplication” stage of counseling” (Oates, 252). This means that as the pastor counsels, the more he begins to counsel the “counselors” of his staff and the less he counsels the helpless (Oates, 253).

This becomes an encouragement for those young in ministry to hear. “It is unmistakably clear to the experienced pastor that he has a major task in counseling others who themselves are carrying major responsibilities as counselors” (Oates, 318). As one who has been involved in several large ministry settings, I have seen first-hand that proper development of mature Christian leaders is crucial to the ongoing and vital ministry of God’s church and the skills required to recruit and train leaders can be found in a counselor’s role.

The task of pastoral ministry as presented in this text is of an enormous scope; the importance of “strengthening many counselors in order that they might become a comfort to those for whom they have responsibility as a counselor” (Oates, 318). This seems overwhelming and stresses my need as an individual to continue to grow in my counseling skills.

## Works Cited

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