
David W. Appleby received PhDs from University of Delaware and the University of Northern Colorado. He is the founder and president of Spiritual Interventions and currently teaches at the Center for Counseling and family Studies at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. He also authored It’s Only a Demon: A Model for Christian Deliverance. George Ohlschlager received a Master of Social Work from the University of Iowa and is a certified Christian counselor with the International Board of Christian Counselors and the American Association of Christian Counseling. Along with this book, he coedited Caring for People God’s Way and coauthored Competent Christian Counseling, Volume One: Foundations and Practice of Compassionate Soul Care.

In Transformative Encounters, Appleby and Ohlschlager collected numerous models of counseling from a Christian perspective. Their book “demonstrates many different situations where the therapist or minister is able to cooperate with God in the accomplishment” of transformation of those suffering (30). Their belief is that secular models have empirical data that suggest they are faithful. Instead, they attempt to subject secular psychology to a Christian worldview (19).

Appleby and Ohlschlager divide the book into four parts of counseling models. In Part 1, models consist of those performed in a church setting by pastors or lay members. Although a counseling should treat the counselee holistically, they deal primarily with the spiritual nature of the problems. The root problems range from bitterness, to mind renewal, to deliverance from demons. The models use prayer as the primary method of healing along with the Scriptures.

The second part focuses on models that integrate secular clinical counseling with a Christian view of counseling. These chapters deal with cognitive behavioral counseling and emotional focused counseling. The purpose of these models helps the counselee modify behaviors that bring guilt into the life of the counselee and aid the counselee in overcoming the emotions that are driving his or her life. Again, the primary means for healing comes through prayer.

The third section of this book encompasses a belief that although the counselees need and receive psychiatric help, they also need spiritual help to complete the healing process. These models are performed in a clinical setting. The authors narrow to specific issues such as trauma, addictions, and improper lifestyles.

In their final section, Appleby and Ohlschlager argue the need to integrate fully psychology with a Christian worldview. From their secular training, they believe in the need for empirical science to reveal what is actually helping counselees. However, they also understand the power of God and how He can affect the counseling sessions. Appleby points out that salvation is necessary to help a counselee in healing with Scriptures (338). Nevertheless, in wrapping the book, Ohlschlager notes that the heart and mind must come together in that the spiritual must integrate with the secular (356-357).

The reader will find that the authors succeed in fulfilling the purpose of the book, which is to give a thorough collection of models for the counselor to use in treating those
who are suffering. He will also find that the authors truly believe that God can heal those who struggle with physical and mental problems. Any Christian should be able to agree with their belief that the Christian worldview should lay the foundation of counseling (19). However, according to the editors, “Scripture and careful reflection on it – the focus of biblical studies and theology – can be considered legitimate sources of psychological knowledge for Christians (21). This statement leads the reader to understand that the Word of God is not really the foundation of the counseling but is instead a tool for counseling. How they use the Scriptures (or their lack of Scripture use) throughout the book supports this understanding.

In Chapter 6, Siang-Yang Tan gives a possible counseling session for spiritually oriented cognitive behavioral therapy. In dealing with a client’s guilt over anger management, Tan asks the counselee what Scriptures may say about anger. Eventually, Ephesians 4:26 is mentioned to give the counselee relief, but no teaching follows the reading of Scripture leaving the counselee to his own interpretation of the verse (123).

Another problem in Abbleby’s chapter concerns deliverance from demons. Although he does believe that demons cannot possess Christians, he does believe that they can control Christians (83). He even claims this principle to be the most biblical one in the book (82). In order to relinquish the counselee from the control of the demons, he advocates demon mapping, which is the interrogation of the immediate demon to discover its name, what other demons are present in the area, and the commanding demon of the area. However, if the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians (Rom. 8:9-11), then demons cannot control them. In addition, even though Christ did command His disciples to cast out demons, no command from Christ to interrogate demons or map the area of which demons control exists.

Another critique is some of the models are not as distinct as the authors think. Some authors such as Mark Sandford, Werner May, and George Ohlschlager ground their work from inner healing. Tan and Ohlschlager try to affect cognitive behavior with Scripture.

Finally, the methods in these pages claim to be distinct from secular psychology in that they begin with a Christian worldview as the foundation (20). However, the reader will notice that the authors, who trained as secular psychologists, merely integrate secular and Christian perspectives together. Contemplative prayer is used as a relaxation technique rather than meditating on Scripture. Tan and Ohlschlager try to give Christian application to cognitive behavior. The emotion-focused therapy is another form of visualization. The authors attempt to Christianize a science that begins with a belief that there is not God.

James Alan Cordes, Jr., Ph.D. student
Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary
Cordova, TN