

BOOK REVIEWS

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL WORK: READINGS ON THE INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE, 4th edition, By Scales, T. Laine and Michael S. Kelly (Eds.). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work, 2012, 424 pp. \$39.95.

Christianity and Social Work: Readings on the Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice is now in its 4th edition. First published in 1999, this text serves primarily the 675 MSW and BSW programs in the U.S., many of which are at religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. The editors describe the volume as created with great effort; in a discipline centrally devoted to practice, assembling an edited volume of researched reflection and faith integration was a feat. The book is published by the North American Association of Christians in Social Work, and in each of its editions it serves upcoming and practicing social workers who wish to live both their profession and their faith in thoughtful, evidenced, and relevant ways.

The book's twenty two chapters are authored by various social workers of faith, and are organized into four sections. Section One addresses the Christian Roots of the Social Work Profession. Other sections would be useful to pastors, therapists, and others in the helping professions, but section One is focused solely on social work. It delves into internal debate within social work regarding the role of Christianity in its development, taking the very strong stance that these chapters offer a corrective and supplement to historical narratives that gloss over or minimize the place of Christian faith in the history of social work.

Section Two is about social work as a religious calling, including the ethical and worldview dimensions of social work practice. This section will be very useful to students of social work, offering stories and spiritual models for understanding the call to human service. Editor Scales, alone with Helen Harris, Dennis Myers and Jon Singletary devote a chapter to describing stories from students, practitioners and faculty who pursued social work from a faith perspective. This chapter, and others, is immediately applicable to classroom settings, helping students reflect on their own vocation and goals.

Section Three addresses "Human Behavior and Spiritual Development in a Diverse World." This is a major issue in social work programs at Christian colleges and universities; how to serve diverse others without compromising or silencing one's own religious values. Here, the fourth edition offers new material, a chapter about social work with LGBT clients. Allison Tan's excellent chapter begins with reviewing the literature for best practices: those working with LGBT clients should have knowledge about discrimination and homophobia, a non-homophobic attitude, and sensitivity to LGBT client issues. She concludes that the Christian social worker's role is not evangelism, nor convincing the client that the client's sexuality is defective or problematic. Rather, the role of the social worker is to "provide all clients with the experience of being loved, forgiven and cared for." Furthermore, she encourages social workers who cannot

engage LGBT clients in such a way to refer the clients elsewhere, and actively engage a process of reflection about these limits. Christian college professors and students will likely see these issues in a variety of ways, but Tan's chapter is a model of scholarly and faithful inquiry, grounded in scholarly literature, persuasive and peaceable in faith stances, and reaching a conclusion that is both clear and that acknowledges "much gray area remains." This chapter will provide a well-researched and well-presented view against which students and professors can define and stretch their own views.

Section Four is about contemporary issues ranging from evangelism to church social work to gang involvement. New here is a chapter on international social work, a growing area of study, student internships, and professional practice. Elizabeth Patterson describes the growing field of international social work, and argues a theological basis for Christian involvement. She names the most important challenges as ethnocentrism and cultural domination; that social workers from both a globally dominant religion and nation may inadvertently harm those they intend to help. By prioritizing humility, cultural learning, and anti-oppressive practice, Christian social workers may expand their vocational vision to include more of the world, and do so in helpful ways. By doing so, "not only will the country or culture of focus benefit, but the social work profession as a whole will benefit from this mutual exchange and from newly developed indigenous, culturally relevant practice models." This chapter harmonizes well with current approaches in anthropology, treating cultural competence as a vital element of meaningful and effective global work.

What does it mean to be a Christian in social work? This book's simple answer, woven through every chapter, is that there's not just one way to be a Christian social worker. The variety of authorial voices shows this to be true, each explaining or encouraging different ways to accomplish their central goal of helping others. Hope Haslam Straughan, in a chapter about spiritual development, describes several models of spiritual formation, showing how a social worker's self-understanding, and view of clients, will vary depending on one's religious tradition and view of spiritual development. She encourages on-going self-reflection and learning, not becoming so bound to a single interpretation that one develops a spiritual bias (which, in her view, "can be just as harmful as racism or sexism"). Most importantly, "Social workers must enter into an awareness of the sacred for themselves and for the persons with whom they work."

This manner of faith integration is compelling: heavy on practice without losing sight of philosophy, open and compassionate but still theologically committed, and most of all, focused on the end goal of serving humanity. In this way, it is more than a guide for future and current social workers. It is a model of faith integration for other academic disciplines, some of which can pursue faith integration in ways that are nearly exclusively philosophical and theological, detached from the mundane details of human interaction. It's also a gracious approach, acknowledging diverse Christian theologies and traditions, and finding common ground in service rather than pushing one theology over others.

Scales and Kelly seem to offer the same advice to social workers as to their clients. "Jesus taught us that the truth will set us free. We believe that God loves us enough to trust us to figure out those truths in our prayer lives, discussion with [others], and lived experience with our clients." Though this book will be read mostly by social workers and their students, we all would do well to hear this book's call to rigorous study, compassionate action, and faith marked by humility and trust.

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