

### ***Family Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal.***

Yarhouse, M. A., & Sells, J. N. (2008). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

AS AN UNDERGRAD IN AN ELITE PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT STRUGGLING with how my newly-forming faith and academic discipline intersected, I was immensely thankful for *Modern Psychotherapies* (InterVarsity Press, 1991). In that volume, Jones and Butman not only summarized most of the major psychological theories, but also looked at the places where psychological epistemologies and worldviews were similar and dissimilar to Christian faith. Without that book, I may not have finished my bachelor's degree with my faith intact.

Years later, when pursuing my master's degree in social work concentrating in child and family studies, I wished earnestly for a similar volume on family therapies. In family therapy, where many of its founders have larger-than-life personalities and many theories contradict others, a solid reference guide that could help synthesize my faith in relationship to each theory's underlying presuppositions was something for which I regularly longed, as both a child welfare practitioner and instructor in family therapy.

I am thankful to say that book has finally arrived. Yarhouse and Sells have combined to produce an erudite and delightfully readable reference work that not only summarizes every major school of family therapy from Freud to the post-structuralist theories like narrative therapy and solution-focused therapy, but also wrestles with each theory's presuppositions in light of a Christian worldview.

The book is divided into four sections: 1) an introduction including both Christian foundations related to family therapy and the history of family therapy as a whole; 2) summaries and Christian critiques of the nine major schools of family therapy and their various subdivisions (e.g., the chapter on strategic therapies deals with both the Haley/Madanes and the Palazzoli/Milan models and the chapter on solution-focused therapies includes both O'Hanlon's possibility therapy and the deShazer/Berg brief therapy models); 3) discussions of Christian family therapy in relationship to critical treatment issues; and 4) conclusions. Each chapter in Section Two contains a description of the theory as well as its major contributors, a Christian appraisal, and a foundational bibliography. Section Three provides good blueprints for approaching various

clinical issues in family services from a reasoned eclectic perspective utilizing both family theories and the Christian worldview.

Probably the most unique offering this book has is a family-systems bibliography related to sexual identity, homosexuality and “reparative therapies.” This is not surprising, given that one of the co-authors presented work at the 2009 American Psychological Association annual meeting related to a longitudinal study of sexual orientation change three days after the APA voted to declare that “reparative therapies” are unethical. Regardless of how one feels about the malleability of sexual orientation, the authors provide a well-balanced bibliography on the subject, not only citing Christian sources and reparative theorists, but also referencing well-known non-Christian researchers in the psychology of sexuality such as Lisa Diamond. This chapter, while favoring a more transformational/reparative position, provides a solid foundation for dialogue between those who agree and those who disagree with the APA’s recent policy change.

The book has some minor weaknesses. The most significant is that the book deals only briefly with attachment theory in the chapter on psychodynamic theory and again within the discussions on trauma and substance abuse. Given the emphasis on attachment and its relationship to object relations theory as developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth, an explicit discussion of attachment theory and a corresponding Christian appraisal would be a valuable contribution to this work. Second, even though this volume is not intended as a skills manual, I would have liked to see more discussion of some well-known family therapy techniques such as family sculpting and psychodrama, as well as a Christian appraisal of them. Finally, the chapter on gender, culture, class, and race could have dealt more directly with the concepts of intersectionality and cultural humility in practice. The chapter provides some starting points, but particularly as intersectionality becomes a major feature of social work research and practice, and cultural humility replaces the concept of cultural competence, Christian family services workers need to be equipped to understand the newer trends in the field.

For the Christian undergraduate beginning an MSW program in child and family services or an MFT program in a non-Christian setting, this book should be a required graduation gift. For the practitioner, this book provides both a foundational bibliography from which to further one’s own knowledge, and at the same time, provide a guide to develop more responsible eclectic practice strategies in a thoughtful,

epistemologically and spiritually sound way. Overall, I believe that this is a reference volume that no Christian family services social worker or marriage and family therapist should be without. v

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