

[MJTM 13 (2011–2012)]

BOOK REVIEW

David Powlison. *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010. 352 pp. Pbk. ISBN 1935273132.

This text is an update of the author's dissertation *Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Anti-Psychiatry Movement* (1996), and offers an insider's look at the Biblical Counseling movement. While this version contains four appendices that do not appear in the original, the body of the text, as with the earlier version, focuses on the early years of the movement (1970 to 1995). Drawing on primary source data, firsthand knowledge derived through conversation, observation, and selected sources from other counseling traditions the author traces the origins and development of this movement.

The book is written in a predominately narrative style that chronicles the immediate historical context, the role and contributions of Jay Adams and other key individuals within the movement, and the significant challenges faced by the Biblical Counseling movement. Powlison notes the influences of secular psychiatry and anti-psychiatrists, such as Szasz and Mowrer, on Adams's thought. This, in turn, contextualizes Adams's break from the mainline pastoral counseling movement and the questions he raised concerning the use of secular psychology by Christian counselors.

While confined to a limited historical frame of reference, this book offers the reader an important lens through which to consider the Biblical Counseling movement as it relates to and differentiates itself from other approaches (such as the Christian Counseling movement and the pastoral counseling movement). Similarly, while historians might wish for a deeper level of historical analysis, the author's reflections provide insights into the

era and the movement that are worth examining in greater depth. For example, despite the author's efforts to acknowledge criticisms made by outsiders (chapter 8), the challenges faced by the movement, and the apparent limitations of Adams's approach, the book merely narrates these critiques and challenges rather than critically evaluating the claims of either Adams or his detractors. Along the same line, while Appendix 4 acknowledges the positive contributions by works such as Thomas Oden's *Classical Pastoral Care* series, and Robert Roberts's *Taking the Word to Heart*, there remains a need for a thorough exploration of the similarities and dissimilarities between the Biblical Counseling movement and Christian Psychology (as opposed to Christian counseling). Furthermore, in an age of professional licensure, there is a need to examine critically the basis upon which this movement can call itself a "counseling movement," as opposed to a movement that focuses on questions related to spiritual formation and the outworking of this in daily living.

Despite its limitations, anyone interested in the practice of counseling from a Christian perspective will find that this book offers a significant alternative to the dominant voice of those who seek to integrate psychology and theology. In addition, students of church history who are interested in the last three decades of the twentieth century are likely to find that this book offers a new perspective on a period of history marked by both a movement to reclaim the church's historical roots and attempts to grapple with the emergent questions of the day.

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