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BOOK REVIEW

Mark A. Yarhouse and James N. Sells. *Family Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017. 551 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-8308-2854-8. \$55.00.

The release of the second edition of Yarhouse and Sells's *Family Therapies* speaks to its role within the Christian counseling literature and Christian higher education. This edition contains a preface, twenty-one numbered chapters, and two indices. An understanding of the Preface is critical to grasping the purpose, outline, content, and argument of *Family Therapies*. Specifically, the authors note that this book emerged out of a "need for a resource for Christians who are engaged in family therapy/counseling ministry" (8). The authors also state that they wrote this book ". . . to provide a framework for Christians entering the field who might want ideas for critical engagement and practical applications" (8).

This edition of *Family Therapies* retains the basic organizational structure of the first edition: "Part I: Foundational Considerations" (chs. 1–2); "Part II: Models of Family Therapy" (chs. 3–12); "Part III: Integration of Family Theory with Critical Issues in Psychotherapy" (chs. 13–20); "Part IV: Casting a Vision" (ch. 21). By retaining the book's original organization, the authors have made it easy for those who are familiar with the first edition to engage the second edition. While much is similar between the two editions, there are some key differences between the first and second editions: e.g., chapters have been updated with new discussions; new source material and recent research findings have been added; the chapter on sexual identity has been replaced by a chapter on LGBTQ2 couples and families; Part III includes a new chapter on cohabiting couples and fami-

lies.

Part I includes two chapters which, while retaining the titles of the first edition, have undergone revision. For example, the opening section of ch. 1, “A Christian Understanding for Family Therapy,” contains a new discussion on “family” that highlights twenty-first century realities in a way that engages the reader to grasp the relevance of what follows—both within the chapter as well as the remainder of the book. Following this brief sociocultural reflection, the authors present a theological framework for reflecting on family from a Christian perspective. Chapter 2, “Historical Foundations of Family Therapy,” offers an accessible and introductory summary of the history of caring for families that acknowledges the historical role played by churches as well as key concerns, themes, and individuals whose work contributed to the emergence of family psychology as a distinct branch of study and practice. While this historical review provides a general introduction to the field it remains descriptive with respect to terms such as “family system,” “systems theory,” “postmodernism,” “social constructivism,” and “constructivism.” This approach to the topic sets *Family Therapies* apart from mainstream texts (cf. Samuel T. Gladding, *Family Therapy: History, Theory, and Practice* [7th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Pearson, 2021]; Irene Goldenberg et al., *Family Therapy: An Overview* [9th ed. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage, 2022]—earlier editions of both texts are cited by Yarhouse and Sells) and reflects the authors’ commitment to providing readers with an integrative and practical Christian approach.

Part II devotes one chapter each to introduce nine schools of family therapy: Bowenian Family Therapy (ch. 3); Strategic Family Therapy (ch. 4); Structural Family Therapy (ch. 5); Psychodynamic Family Therapy (ch. 6); Contextual Family Therapy (ch. 7); Experiential Family Therapy (ch. 8); Solution-Focused Family Therapy (ch. 9); Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy (ch. 10); Narrative Family Therapy (ch. 11). For the most part, the theories highlighted in these chapters are theories that are generally defined as “first generation family therapies,” that is, theories that focus on family structure, family function/dysfunction, family communication, and family interactions. The chap-

ters that focus on Solution-Focused Family Therapy and Narrative Family Therapy introduce the reader to second generation approaches. In addition, references to the work of Susan Johnson (chs. 8, 14) and John Gottman (chs. 10, 14, 20) incorporate findings of evidence-based or third generation approaches to family therapy.

Although this arrangement appears to be similar to mainstream texts on family therapy, there are several key differences that merit mention. First, it is not Yarhouse and Sells's intention to engage these approaches at the same level of detail as is found in mainstream texts on family therapy. Rather, their intention is that of "reflecting on the most influential first-generation models of family therapy and engaging them as Christians" (8).

Next, the authors supplement their discussions of these schools of family psychotherapy with a Christian evaluation of the model or school of thought under consideration. These evaluations highlight the authors' assessments of the strengths and deficiencies present within each school of family therapy that is described in *Family Therapies*. These reflections are both an important contribution to the field and are consistent with a key purpose of the text—to provide a Christian appraisal of the theory and practice of family therapy. In the process the authors lay some of the practical and theoretical foundations for their integrative approach to family therapy. Despite the fact the authors return in their proposed integrative model (ch. 12) to the three key themes identified in chapter one (i.e., family functioning, family relationships, and family identity), this reviewer wished that their integrative framework had been explicitly incorporated and developed in their evaluations of each of the selected models of family therapy discussed in this text.

Lastly, this text differs from many traditional texts on family counseling or family therapy—Christian or secular—in that the authors' intent is to provide an integrated approach as opposed to an approach that is based within a single methodological framework (e.g., DeLoss D. Friesen and Ruby M. Friesen, *Family Counseling* [Dallas, TX: Word, 1989]). Thus, chapter 12 reveals the authors' awareness of integrative models of family therapy while at the same time defining the parameters for a decidedly

Christian integration of family therapy theory and practices.

Yarhouse and Sells's integrated model draws upon themes and emphases drawn from the models described in chs. 3–11 and the Christian foundations they presented in ch. 1. As a person of faith who is also a practicing psychotherapist, this reviewer welcomed the authors' desire to create a vision for a distinctly Christian approach to family therapy and affirms the value of the building blocks for their integrative model. However, the brevity of chapter twelve left this writer yearning for a more thoroughly elaborated theory that was at least partially satisfied by Yarhouse and Sells' decision to demonstrate the application of their model by engaging specific topics of interest (Part III).

In Part III, "Integration of Family Theory with Critical Issues in Psychotherapy," the authors invite the reader to witness their application of this model to working with families who are experiencing: Crisis and Trauma (ch. 13); Marital Conflict (ch. 14); Separation, Divorce, and Remarriage (ch. 15); Individual Psychopathology (ch. 16); Substance Abuse (ch. 17). In addition to these topics of interest, the authors also extend their reflections to three realities of contemporary life: Gender, Culture, Economic Class, and Race (ch. 18); Cohabiting Couples and Families (ch. 19); LGBTQ2 Couples and Families (ch. 20).

While some readers may be tempted to read Part III of *Family Therapies* separate from Part II, it is important to highlight that the intent in this section of the book is to further the reader's understanding of Yarhouse and Sells's model by demonstrating how they envision its use with specific family situations. The authors are to be commended for wanting to demonstrate their model in action. Indeed, this is an important contribution of this book to the Christian counseling literature. Similarly, the authors are to be applauded for including topics within this section which historically have been absent from many Christian books about the family. As noted in ch. 1, families in Western culture—and North American culture—are no longer constructed on a foundation that reflects the influence of Christian values. For this reason, this book is important because it engages the reader to think about the families they encounter within the community and the church and how they might provide care to these families. This

emphasis on practical care is valuable.

Thirdly, the authors are to be admired for the range of topics discussed in Part III, each of which could be made the focus of at least one book. Indeed, there were times when it seemed like too much was included in this section. As a result, the breadth of these topics and the constraints to stay within a single chapter means that the intersections between the topics presented in these chapters are not well developed. For example, understanding the impact of terrorist violence-related crises (ch. 13) is likely to intersect with how the client and therapist each perceive the roles of gender, culture, class, and race (ch. 18). Similarly, the challenges of marital conflict (ch. 14) cannot be separated from the roles of gender, culture, class, and race (ch. 18), and may also merit consideration of the problem of family violence (ch. 13).

The final section of this book, Part IV: Casting a Vision, consists of a single brief chapter in which the authors acknowledge that some Christian counselors and therapists work within the Christian community while others work outside the community of faith. Thus, the authors invite Christian family counselors to practice what missiologists refer to as contextualization in which they “adapt the truth of Scripture to the social environment” (536).

By way of evaluation, *Family Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* invites readers to develop an integrated Christian approach to the practices of family ministry, family counseling, and family therapy. Admittedly there will be readers who, like this reviewer, will be surprised, perhaps disappointed, because some authors, models, themes, etc. which are known and familiar to them are either missing or not discussed as fully as they might prefer. In light of the purposes described in the Preface, this is not the standard by which this book is to be evaluated—i.e., “. . . to provide a framework for Christians entering the field who might want ideas for critical engagement and practical applications” (8). In this respect, Yarhouse and Sells have provided their readers with a framework (chs. 1, 12) for engaging theories of family therapy and created an integrated theory of Christian practice for working with families.

While they have achieved their basic purpose, it is worth reflecting further on Yarhouse and Sells's integrated theory of practice (ch. 12). For several years this reviewer has invited students to incorporate the characteristics of an integrated theory of Christian marital counseling described by Everette L. Worthington (*Marriage Counseling: A Christian Approach to Counseling Couples* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989] 19–20) to guide their thinking about family counseling and therapy. Yarhouse and Sells's model reflects many of the characteristics put forward by Worthington: it considers individual constructs and the family as a unit system; it incorporates Christian concepts; theory of family therapy is simple enough to be used clinically; and it informs an integrated practice of therapy. One key factor, however, is missing. Namely, the authors do not identify a body of research that supports this specific integrative model of family therapy. Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to obtain funding to support a research program. However, the development of a research base that demonstrates the efficacy of Yarhouse and Sells's integrative model would elevate it to the level of a third-generation family therapy model.

In conclusion, despite the lack of research literature to support Yarhouse and Sells's integrative approach, their model is compelling and is an important addition to the Christian literature related to the practice of marriage and family therapy.

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