

CARE IN A CONFUSED CLIMATE: Pastoral care and post-modern culture, by Paul Goodliff, D.L.T. 1998, 272 pp. £12.95

Goodliff, a Baptist pastor, reflects upon the challenges to pastoral care posed by post-modern culture. Goodliff describes the nature of postmodernism and then goes on to argue that the future health of pastoral care is rooted in a Trinitarian faith coupled with a radical engagement of dialogue with our culture. He concludes that four urgent tasks arise from the priorities of pastoral care: building Christian community; creating relational health in a fragmented society by sustaining friendships and family relationships; healing the wounded soul through pastoral counselling and nurturing and sustaining faith. The result is a clear, competent and accessible introduction to pastoral care and some of the themes of pastoral theology. No doubt it will be widely used by students who, understandably, will want to find an easy way into what can prove to be a difficult terrain. Goodliff from his liberal evangelical stance is a careful and considerate guide. He manages to hold together the reality and importance of faith while also recognising that pastoral care has much to learn from the secular world in terms of understanding relationships and organising healthy groups. Here is pastoral care which takes context seriously. However, this book only goes so far in providing a creative or innovative voice. While it is fair to say that there is very little new and innovative writing in the area of pastoral studies emerging out of the U.K. at the moment, this book adds little to the field on pastoral studies. It was surprising, for example, not to see more openness about Goodliff's own personal or professional agenda. I kept wondering about why one should do theology in this kind of way and what it was that Goodliff was defending. While the appeal to orthodoxy has its attractions, Goodliff failed to offer any thought as to why this framework might change the function and practice of pastoral care. Put another way there is a curious gap between theory and practice; words and experience. This dynamic is critical in our evaluation of pastoral care within the present context. I am not convinced that the post-modern world is as antagonistic towards the nature of God as some have suggested. I still sense in many aspects of my work a profound desire to explore meaning and purpose and depth of life. It seems questionable (at best) therefore about how some of the sweeping statements (for example loss of dependence on God, page 33) relate to my own pastoral experience of where people are in their spiritual struggle. Theological orthodoxy won't necessarily liberate us into a connection with this process. However these questions should not detract from what is a useful addition to any library of pastoral care.

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