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Strategic Pastoral Counseling

6. The Uniqueness of Pastoral Counseling

This chapter argues that pastoral counseling, while overlapping with secular counseling, is distinct in five ways: the counselor's training, role, context, goals, and resources. It closes with a formal definition and a case for keeping pastoral counseling brief.

Key takeaways

- **Training:** pastors are the only counselors grounded in theology, Scripture, ethics, and church history, giving them a spiritual, whole-person perspective. They should not abandon it for a psychological one.
- **Role:** as symbolic representatives of the church, pastors are the helper most people turn to first for personal problems (studies in 1957 and 1976).
- **Context:** the church setting and community of faith speed trust and let the pastor act as a 'broker,' connecting the hurting to the church's supportive relationships.
- **Goals:** the aim is not primarily solving problems but facilitating spiritual growth — helping people understand their lives in light of their relationship with God. All problems have a spiritual dimension.

- Resources: prayer, Scripture, and sacraments are unique tools, but must be used with sensitivity, never mechanically or to avoid real dialogue. They must first be alive in the pastor's own life.
- Pastoral counseling should be brief: pastors lack the time, and usually the advanced psychological training, for long-term therapy. It supplements but does not replace medical/psychological care.
- Know your limits and refer when reached: 'There is no one for whom pastoral counseling is inappropriate. There are only people for whom it may be insufficient by itself.'

Passages worth keeping

"The essence of pastoral counseling is helping troubled people bring their woundedness, struggles, doubts, and anxieties into dynamic healing contact with the God who is known by his people as the wonderful Counselor."

The book's core definition of the pastor's real task.

"Its use must never, therefore, be mechanical, legalistic, or magical."

Guards religious resources from becoming a way to dodge honest dialogue or control the person.

How it connects

The chapter leans on the picture of God as the true Counselor (cf. Isaiah 9:6): the pastor's job is not technique but mediating God's healing presence.

Scripture referenced

- **Psalm 6:6; 13:1-2; 31:10; 73:13-14** -- Cited as passages that legitimize voicing raw grief, doubt, and anger before God.