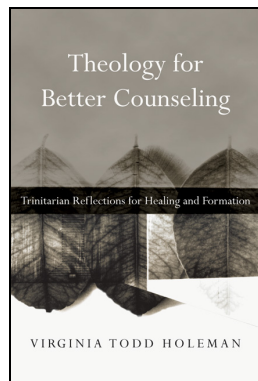


## BOOK EXCERPT



*Theology for Better Counseling: Trinitarian Reflections for Healing and Formation*

**December 2012**

\$20, 208 pages, paper

978-8308-3972-8

## Psychologist explores the need to become biblically literate to repair theological cognitive dissonance

Upon graduation, I worked in a Christian counseling practice. As was appropriate and with my clients' permission, I used the Bible, the Christian counseling model I had learned and books written by other Christian mental health professionals to augment my work with clients. If asked, I would affirm that I counseled from a Christian worldview or that I was a Christian counselor. For the most part that was adequate for the day. Yet there were times when my clients pressed me for more—when they asked important questions that arose from their life circumstances. “Where was God while I was being raped when I was a missionary?” “How could God let this tragedy happen to my loved one?” Some of my clients struggled with *wanting* to forgive someone who had hurt them deeply and unjustly, but *could not do so* at that time. They wondered if God would reject them. Other clients no longer wanted to be threatened or beaten in their own home. They knew that God hated divorce, and they felt guilty for contemplating divorce from their abusive and unrepentant spouses. They desperately wanted to obey God but they also wondered if that implied that God had assigned “spouse abuse” as their particular cross to bear.

These clients labored to make Christian sense of their suffering and they were asking for my help. They were not asking for a seminar on theology *but were, in fact, asking hard theological questions*. They agonized over a disconnection between their assumptions of what they believed God *could or should* do for them and their present painful circumstances. Some wrestled with the problem of evil and the justice of God, or the question of theodicy. Others were confounded by a theological dissonance between their understanding of God's sovereignty and their experience of being “trespassed against” severely and unjustly. From one perspective these clients were living with a conflict between their explicit knowledge of God and the Christian life and their implicit knowledge of living as followers of Jesus. What had happened to them or their loved ones just did not fit with their “in the bones” understanding of God. As a result they experienced a kind of *theological disequilibrium* or a *theological cognitive dissonance*, which left them discouraged, disoriented and often distraught. By the grace of God I was able to walk beside my clients as they journeyed through these

## BOOK EXCERPT



**Virginia Todd**

**Holeman** is professor of counseling at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. She previously taught at Ashland Theological Seminary and Kent State University, and worked at New Life Family Ministries in Akron, Ohio. Holeman is a licensed psychologist in Ohio and a licensed marriage and family therapist in Kentucky. As a member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, she leads workshops and seminars around the country. She contributes to professional journals and speaks at churches, conferences and universities on the topics of forgiveness and family.

unexplored and unwelcome theological places.

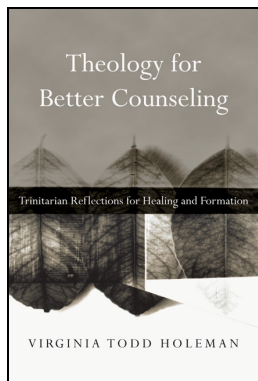
A few more years and a doctoral degree later I accepted a faculty position at Asbury Theological Seminary. Here I met my theological Waterloo. I came face to face with the realization that I had skated by with *thin* theological reflection for years. If I was going to teach in a counseling program that took theological integration seriously, then I had some important study and personal growth ahead of me. The language of theology is different than that of therapy, and I applied myself to learn this new lingo and to let this new language seep into the core of my being to help me become more of the person (and clinician) that God was calling me to become. Broadening my explicit study of theology and biblical study went hand in hand with deepening my relationship with God. I experienced a kind of conversion of my imagination, a “transformation of ideals and perceptions, and a resocialization into a new community of reference and faithfulness.”

I began to read books written by *real* theologians. I also formed friendships with faculty colleagues whose areas of expertise were theology or biblical studies. I was becoming more theologically fluent and was able to translate thick theological concepts into everyday language and life for myself, my clients and my students. Finally I began to think and live theologically at an enriched level.

As postmodern therapies and neuroscientific discoveries deepened my understanding of self-identity as “person-in-relationship,” theologians expanded my understanding of the Trinity as “Divine-person-in-relationship.” Theological perspectives on human relationships enriched my study of individual, couples and family counseling. Several theologians explored theologies of Christian forgiveness at the same time that I was involved with empirical studies on psychological forgiveness. Biblical and theological work on God’s justice resonated with my interest in counseling as a form of advocacy for social justice. Other theologians wrestled with human suffering in light of the goodness of God, which contributed to my work with crisis and trauma counseling. Today I could no more think of counseling without a solid theological foundation than I could imagine consulting a medical doctor who had only a rudimentary understanding of anatomy!

—Adapted from chapter 1,  
*“Is All This Fuss About Theology Really Necessary?”*

## ENDORSEMENTS



*Theology for Better Counseling: Trinitarian Reflections for Healing and Formation*

December 2012

\$20, 208 pages, paper

978-8308-3972-8

## Holeman receives high praise for new book, *Theology for Better Counseling*

*“The great risk of twenty-first-century Christian counseling is becoming uprooted, neglecting the theological essence of our work. Dr. Holeman’s book *Theology for Better Counseling* is an important corrective. She weaves theological insight and clinical wisdom together in this readable and practical book. I commend it to you.”*

**Mark R. McMinn**, author, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling* and coauthor, *Integrative Psychotherapy*

*“Theology for Better Counseling provides a thoughtful integration of theological themes into counseling practice that is judiciously informed by the author’s Wesleyan roots. Dr. Holeman effectively weaves together prominent theological themes with research that describes the common factors that account for success in counseling practice. Her book advances the discussion of what constitutes Christian counseling and should be read by practicing professionals and counselors in training as they grapple with the challenges of explicit faith integration into counseling practice. I wish this book had been available during my graduate training.”*

**Chuck Romig**, Ph.D., Graduate Counseling Program, John Brown University

*“Many—both laypeople and those who consider themselves theologians—flaunt the word theology. Yet, as Dr. Holeman demonstrates in her work, that does not mean that these people can articulate their theology and how it affects (for good or bad) their work with people. . . . If you have been searching for a book that clearly highlights God’s therapeutic presence and work in the lives of people, hence making theology practical in the discipline of counseling, you have found it! I would be so bold as to say that Holeman’s insights in this work are not limited to the counseling but all intervention professions and ministries with people.”*

**Anne Kiome Gatobu**, dean of the School of Practical Theology, associate professor of pastoral counseling, Asbury Theological Seminary

## ENDORSEMENTS

*“While I am an active professional counselor and not a theologian, I find Dr. Holeman’s book challenges me to see the links between my counseling practice and my own personal Christian theology. She weaves the two together by both concept and case study, so when applied, I grow into a more competent, theologically reflective counselor. This can be beneficial to both myself and my client(s), plus it surely must please the heart of God.”*

**Bonnie Crandall, M.A., L.P.C.C.**

*“In Theology for Better Counseling, Virginia Todd Holeman artfully weaves together theological depth and practical counseling wisdom in ways I can immediately use as a therapist. Her mature integrative model emerges from her own personal and professional journey of spiritual growth and disciplined reflection, which is exactly the kind of integration needed for Christian counseling practice.”*

**Steven Sandage**, associate professor, Bethel Seminary

*“In Theology for Better Counseling, Holeman provides a bridge linking the languages of theology and psychology, demonstrating a theologically reflective model to integrate faith and counseling. Through case examples, jargon-free explanations and clear applications, this book provides a valuable tool for all who consider themselves Christian counselors.”*

**Judith A. Schwanz, Ph.D.**, professor of pastoral care and counseling, Nazarene Theological Seminary

*“For current or aspiring counselors who want a clear look into what it means to integrate theology into their counseling practice—this book is a must-read. Dr. Holeman does a masterful job unfolding her own journey of faith integration, allowing the reader to walk alongside her while asking and answering questions of what it means to be a counselor who is a Christian.”*

**Todd Frye**, professor of counseling, MidAmerica Nazarene University