



***Competent to Counsel*, by Jay Adams**

reviewed by Charles Sigler, D.Phil.

Written in 1970, *Competent to Counsel* critiques the undiscerning use of psychological thought and practices within the church, and began a biblical counseling movement that continues among conservative Christians today. Adams questioned the automatic deferral to “a self-appointed caste” of psychiatrists and therapists as the experts for understanding why we do the things we do, and as the preferred “ministers” for Christians who needed counsel for their various life situations and problems. He also introduced a system of counseling that came to be known as nouthetic counseling.

In *Competent to Counsel*, Adams says the heart of nouthetic counseling is a confrontation between the person and the Word of God. “Nouthetic” confrontation, seeks to effect personality and behavior change (primarily through verbal means) that is motivated by love and concern for the person to be presented to Christ mature and complete (Colossians 1:28).

The foundation for what continue to be crucial issues for Biblical counseling was also addressed in *Competent to Counsel*. In the Introduction, Adams stated his method was presuppositional, rather than scientific. The Bible was his standard for all faith and practice; the basis by which he sought to make every judgment. He didn't reject science, but saw it as a "useful adjunct" for the purposes of illustration. Particularly within the area of psychiatry, Adams thought that "science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and speculation." In discussing an example of what he considered to be giving a Christian coating to the same old mix of psychological ideas, he declared that "This baptizing of secular anthropological views which has frequently characterized much of what has been called Christian counseling, must be rejected."

Some of the issues and references will seem dated to today's reader, but this book is a “must read” for any Christian seriously wrestling with the

proper role of psychological thought or counseling within the life and ministry of the church. Adams demonstrates that every Christian should consider himself or herself to be *potentially* competent to counsel others.