

**Vol. 2 No. 2 of the
SGM JOURNAL:**

Refresh

Spiritual Abuse

**Summer 2002-2003 ISSUE:
"Spiritual Abuse"**

Spiritual Growth Ministries has published a newsletter twice yearly since our inception in 1981. Since Winter 2001 this has become the **SGM Journal of Contemplative Spirituality**, *Refresh*.

Each issue works with a theme that is both relevant and stimulating of thought, prayer and discipleship. In this issue we focus on the problem of Spiritual Abuse.

Previously, the full version of the SGM Newsletter has been available on the SGM website. With the commencement of *Refresh* we are placing a nearly complete selection of key articles from each issue on the website.

The full Journal is available by mail. There is a suggested donation of \$5 per issue (New Zealand subscribers) to help cover costs of publication and postage. Simply email our Administrator, Carole Hunt, with your name, postal address and email address and you will be added to our mailing list:

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of Spiritual Growth Ministries Journal of Contemplative Spirituality:**

Refresh

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COMMENT by Andrew Dunn

Spiritual abuse is the term used to describe the pain and wounding to the faith and growth of people caused by leaders, churches, elders and deacons, styles of ministry and forms of church programmes and renewal. It is evident in movements too - e.g. feminism's treatment of men, patriarchy's stance towards women. It's not confined to any single denomination or style of church. However, as we shall see, it tends to develop around certain types of ministry, ways of wielding power, styles of doing the faith, personalities and views of ministry and leadership.

The term itself

Spiritual abuse is not so well known, but awareness of the feelings and reactions to it abound, and always have! It impacts on a person's faith and spiritual and personal integrity and relationship with God, freedom in their journeys, ways of praying and of relating to God. When the central truths and experiences of our faith and most loved scripture passages are bent towards ends other than our growth in Christ and maturity of discipleship, it often dawns on us that we are being used or controlled for other purposes - that is spiritual abuse.

The impact

The impact of this is no small matter. One colleague responded to my reference to spiritual abuse in her life with these words: "When I attempt to describe to someone why I left the church, or the events that led to my departure the term *spiritual abuse* almost seems like a dumbing down of what happened. It suggests nothing of the turmoil, nothing of the despair and groaning of my soul when I understood that my faith and trust in God had been based on a lie".

Nevertheless it is a useful term to describe a wide range of experiences that leave anything from a vague sense of unease, the source of which is often unclear, through a clear sense of manipulation by spiritual and emotional control, to the deep damage and anger caused by misuse of power and boundary violations. Our journey with God and more deeply into God is ours, uniquely ours, and no one should step in there and mess around with it. God's grace is unique to each of us and no one should attempt to control or interpret or steer it for purposes other than it is given for, our wooing and growing in the love of God.

How much better to give folk the space and time to discover the riches for themselves?

Preaching, discipling and house group leading can be done from a spiritually nourishing point of view that encourages exploration of the riches of deepening relationship with God!

What kinds of people are involved in spiritually abusing others?

"We've all been involved in it at one time or another" said a Workgroup member as we discussed this issue of Refresh! While I can't speak for others I can certainly own to the truth of that myself, to my shame and sorrow. It is so easy to think we know how it is for others spiritually and to attempt to interpret that for them. However, it is clear from the growing literature on spiritual abuse that certain profiles of abusers are emerging: leaders who see themselves as especially anointed by God; leaders who have a strong vision for their church often motivated by a passion for results; people in top-down styles of leadership where the top dog channels the message or vision from God to the people. Often there are personality inadequacies involved as well with lack of recognition of what these are and therefore little or no work on them for healing and wholeness. Usually there is a resistance to deeper personal work through spiritual direction and therapy, and active resistance to these at times. Often there is no professional supervision of work and ministry. "No one is going to look over my shoulder" kind of attitude is a clear misunderstanding of supervision but illustrates a degree of individualism that is dangerous.

Abuse can so easily happen when those ministering or leading are workaholics and driven people. It's amazing how adequate self care, relaxation and spiritual nourishment can bring healthier perspectives into ministry.

More dangerous though, is when the misuse of spiritual authority comes from our own inadequate or unhealed personalities, deep seated insecurities, fear of failure or loss of control. There may be a lack of a deep sense of God's grace and love even when these are often spoken of and preached.

It also happens when someone interprets another person's dreams or places an interpretation on something discovered that comes out of the interpreter's view rather than allowing it to arise out of prayer and listening to the music of the Spirit.

A thought about "passion" - isn't the only genuinely safe passion God's passion for us and for all people, and for creation? And isn't our task to participate in that loving and grace-full service in Jesus name, and with the humility and mind of Christ, as the early Christian hymn printed below has it? Passions tend to produce enthusiasms and methods that are often less than pure and holy, fair and loving. At worst they are wide open to the seductions of power and prestige.

Why does it happen to us?

Sometimes it comes out of the best of motives - caring for people and wanting the best for them, the problem being that the leaders' views of "best" may not be the best for others. It can come from the model of church being promoted, especially when it is something that has worked elsewhere and if only we could do the same here we too could grow a church like that! But more subtly this type of power and manipulation can come from desires for power and control, the flip-side of which may be pride, ladder climbing, seeking to emulate someone who has influenced or modelled ministry or church or counselling or spiritual direction for us. I recall our homiletics lecturer when I was a student telling us that as he listened to our sermons being preached in the chapel he could close his eyes and hear the ministers who had shaped and moulded us in our formative years! So the impact of those who have shaped us is significant.

In what kinds of churches do we find this abuse?

The answer is that it is in every kind of church - wherever authority and power is misused. It's wherever church rules and authority push people around, draft and regiment them and set restrictive boundaries regarding ministry, worship, service, approach to the Lord's Table or people's spiritual growth. It is evident where children and adults are sexually abused and misused, the damage of which filters into every nook and cranny of people's beings including their spirituality and relationship with God.

It has been observed that a church with manipulative, coercive leadership, will eventually take on that mantle and become abusive as well! That's frightening!

Marva Dawn offers this observation, "Our churches act as fallen powers when they forget the cross at their center" (*Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God*. 71).

What do we do with our abuse of others?

Acknowledge it - repent of it - seek help whether counselling, therapy, spiritual direction or supervision of our work. Seek forgiveness where possible, apologise and do *everything* necessary to put to rights the hurts given.

Of things contemplative

So what does the contemplative way of spirituality offer us here? It starts by honouring each person's experiences of God as genuine and encourages them to take "a long loving look at the real". It seeks to help people to see their faith and life in terms of a deepening journey with God of which God is the leader and guide. It aids this by encouraging us to discover the deepening relationship with Christ that is described as *union* with him. It focuses attention not on achievement, service or obedience but on "listening to the music of the Spirit" and growing in the delicate areas of trust and love. Appropriate service will naturally follow. It does not link blessing and growth with fruitfulness and service. It encourages freedom to explore the whole wide territory of grace rather than the prescribed (and often proscribed) packages of faith that various churches and movements represent. It embraces Paul's word to the Galatians in his

discussion about the tensions between works and grace, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Freedom, not license - freedom to be a disciple of Jesus, a learner in his school of faith, a journeyer and explorer of the landscapes of grace.

Above all, the contemplative way encourages and fosters the owning of all our wounds, the embrace of our weakness where God's grace is able to be our strength, and the acknowledgement that the response to the good news is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.

DEFINITIONS

Spiritual abuse is the misuse of power, position and influence for the personal gain of the leader or leaders of an organisation or movement. *mazoe .com/abusers*

It's possible to become so determined to defend a spiritual place of authority, a doctrine or a way of doing things that you wound and abuse anyone who questions, or disagrees, or doesn't 'behave' spiritually the way you want them to. When your words and actions tear down another, or attack or weaken a person's standing as a Christian - to gratify you, your position or your beliefs while at the same time weakening or harming another - that is spiritual abuse. David Johnson & Jeff Van Vonderen. *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*.

Spiritual abuse happens when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control or exploit a follower, thus causing spiritual wounds. Ken Blue - *Healing Spiritual Abuse*. IVP 1993. 12.

What is spiritual abuse? Just As emotional abuse affects one emotionally, while physical abuse inflicts pain and bodily injury on its victim, spiritual abuse affects one spiritually. It is a result of a spiritual leader or system who tries to control, manipulate, or dominate a person. The control is often in the form of fear. Lois E. Gibson. *Spiritual Abuse Website*.

The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teaches of God's Law. You won't go wrong in following their teaching on Moses. But be careful about following *them*. They talk a good line, but they don't live it. They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behaviour. It's all spit-and-polish veneer. Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. Jesus - Matthew 23:2-4 *The Message*.

All the definitions of spiritual abuse in the literature involve the use of *power* or *authority* to *manipulate* and *control*. The authority is often a leader but may be, for example, from a church board towards a leader, or a system such as a set of beliefs or a way of doing things which doesn't allow for individual freedom. Jeannie Cochrane. *Spiritual Abuse*. See her research paper later in this Journal.

Thoughts

Why have we turned pastors into successful CEOs instead of shepherds of the weak?

Why do we search for pastors who are handsome, sophisticated, charismatic - instead of models of suffering?

Why do our churches adopt practices of business life and its achievement models?

Why do we resort to gimmicks, or what Jacques Ellul calls Technique, instead of practicing an unadulterated handling of the Word?"

Marva Dawn - *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God*.
Eerdmans 2001 p57

The Ravensbruck Prayer

This prayer was found scrawled on a piece of wrapping paper in the Ravensbruck
Concentration camp.*

LORD

Remember not only the men and women of good will
but all those of ill will.

Do not only remember all the sufferings they have subjected us to.

Remember the fruits we brought forth thanks to this suffering -

Our comradeship

Our loyalty

Our humility

Our courage and generosity,

the greatness of heart that all of this inspired.

And when they come to judgement,

let all those fruits we have borne

be their reward

and their forgiveness.

Amen

*Ravensbruk was the only major
Nazi concentration camp
for women.

Contributed by
Anne Dilenschneider, San Mateo, California

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN HYMN

Philippians 2: 5-11 NRSV

Let the same mind be in you
that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself

and became obedient to the
point of death -
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly
exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

GOD WHO ARE YOU?

Spiritual Abuse: It's effects on our naming and experiencing of God, and worship to support change.

by Margaret Schrader

any of us are naming the fact that we have been spiritually abused, by parents, teachers, clergy, house group leaders. This abuse affects the way we see ourselves, and our place in the World, our belief system, and the way we see God. I want to focus on the way abuse effects our naming and experiencing of God and an experiment in worship that helps those who have been abused.

It seems to me that the earlier the abuse happens the greater its effects on our view of life and of God. Those of us who were abused in our early years may not have the discernment to recognize the power imbalance in the relationship. We find it difficult to recognize that this view is not the only one, or to find the strength to get out from under or challenge it.

Sometimes this abuse happens because people teach us about god who punishes, judges without compassion, who looks down from heaven with a big black book and keeps notes of all our mistakes. Other times the abuse is far subtler not necessarily in naming God but by the way those who do interpret God for us treat us.

Many of us may describe God as loving, forgiving, just and compassionate but when the rubber hits the road this is not the way we perceive God. It is as though there is a second and perhaps a third level under the conscious one. That is unfortunately what motivates our lives.

I often ask people in spiritual direction what they think God is really like?

When you're really vulnerable how do you think of God?

These are some of the answers:

God is like a hard steel clamp - once he gets me in his vice he won't let me go.

God is like Jekyll and Hyde loving one moment and frighteningly manipulative the other.

God is against people like me. I am gay so there is no hope for me.

My father sexually abused me and my mother told me I was a dirty little slut and God would never forgive me. I've almost dealt with the sexual abuse but it is the idea that God will never forgive me that frightens me most.

My baby died at birth and my Christian friend told me I must have done something wrong for God to punish me that way.

When we are in pain or vulnerable others' words seem to be able to penetrate in to deeper places than they would normally.

Our images of God define how we live our lives. If we live with an image of God who is loving we are likely to be loving and secure in the world. If God is one who punishes us for our very being we will live our lives in fear, not venturing to grow, or give up fear and live life dangerously because we have nothing to lose and we believe are already damned.

If God is one who demands that we give and give and give without counting the cost, we end up with burn-out or a sense of our own worth being related to how much we give others, without ever allowing ourselves to receive, or just relax in God's love.

If our picture of God is of one who changes from hot to cold on a whim, who is not "the same forever" how is there any security? So we respond perhaps with fear or live our lives without any sense of stability.

Unfortunately the metaphor Father so loved by many Christians becomes a stumbling block for others, whose fathers were abusive. Or when the only images of God are masculine. It seems simple for a man to know he is made in the image of God. But a woman or a little girl always has to make a subtle shift when she hears that God is Father, Son, Shepherd, King, Lord and she is made in that image. Perhaps she senses she has to deny her own sexual identity as a female in order to know that she too is made in the image of God. When churches use exclusively masculine images of God they deprive their members of the riches of God.

Unfortunately there is often a close link between early abuse, and spiritual abuse.

Partly it is that the one who has been abused sexually, if in a Christian environment, often receives spiritual abuse at the same time - e.g. "Don't tell your mummy or God will punish you." For others there is the confusing link between love and power, when the abuser is a loved family member. Moreover, the subtle knowing that there are some people who have power over you and that it is not wise to resist, gets translated in later life into a fear of standing up to the abuser or of being in a loving intimate relationship with God

Some Suggested Ways Through.

So what do we do if we know that we have been abused or are being abused in the church or in a current relationship? How do we work with this?

For many of us the very naming of what is happening is all we need and we can get on with life and with God. Others may need to confront the abuser or move to a safer church. But for many others the abuse is too big and they may need help.

Spiritual Direction or Pastoral Help

We are dealing with very important issues and it is often difficult to see clearly what is going on within our own inner world without a helper. This person needs to be someone you really trust and you know will not reabuse you. Often our prayerful intuition will tell us who this person is.

Unfortunately for some of us the idea of praying for the right person is fraught because of our own image of the god to whom we are praying. When you talk to this person, maybe a spiritual director, take it at your pace. You don't have to tell the whole story at once. It is important that you keep yourself safe.

Journal

Buy a journal. Make sure it is kept in a safe place and pour out your thoughts and your feelings in writing. Be as honest with yourself as you feel you can be at present. This healing will take time. Give it your time for it is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.

If you find you are writing the same thing over and over, try another way. Perhaps write a really honest letter to your abuser (don't send it) or to God or to the most loving person you know telling them all about it.

Draw, paint, clay or collage

Chose the colour that most suits your mood and start to make marks on the paper. Scribble or draw your feelings. Draw pictures of God, the one you have been taught to believe in and the one in your best moments you know to be true. Put your feelings in to the clay.

Find pictures and words in magazines reflecting what you think and feel and make a collage.

If you are drawing it may be good to draw in lots of safety first. This may be a safe border, or a special room or someone or something that helps you feel safe and secure.

Use your body

Put on music that expresses your feelings and move to it. Go to a private place where you won't be disturbed like the hills or the beach and tell the waves or the hills what is happening to you. It is OK to yell. God can take it.

Scripture

Take some of the Biblical stories that are meaningful to you and put yourself into them. The prodigal son/daughter, the woman with the haemorrhage,

The shepherd and the sheep, Jesus and the children are some I use frequently, or repeat some of your favourite words perhaps from the psalms or other scriptures. Suck them like you do a cough lozenge.

E.g. "God loves me".

For some for whom the bible has been used abusively, you may need a sabbath from scripture.

Find something else that soothes and meets your need for spiritual nourishment. There are plenty of good books out there.

Pray

Take the plunge and pray. "Loving God show yourself to me". Know that the truth does set you free.

Visual Helps

It may be that you have a picture or an object that in some ways mediates God's unconditional love to you. I know of people who have pictures of mother and child, of birds in a nest in the midst of a storm, of Mt Taranaki, of Jesus in the storm, of flowing water that reminds them of Jesus the

living water. Put your object somewhere so that it can speak its message to you.

Rely on the faith of someone you love and trust

Ask a good friend to hold you in their prayers while you do this journey. Sometimes in our families one member will tell lies about a parent and stop another member from relating happily. If that parent is really loving they will do all that they can to make good the relationship with the one who has been hurt. If we do that surely our God will do that even more. God is on your side and continues to long for good relationship with you. If you can't believe that ask a friend to believe and pray for you.

Worship in safety

For some to find a place to worship safely is a big issue. In Palmerston North some of us have set up worship times mid week. We call it *Sacred Space*. Among those who come are some who have felt abused by their churches. We try to offer a welcoming space where we are all free to chose whether we want to be part of the activity or not. There is no force or coercion. There are few words and many of those are in the form of poetry, story or personal stories. No one tells another what to believe. We are often left with a question. We use a variety of ways of helping people have their own experiences of God, using our senses, imagination and various ways of praying and we include a period of silence.

We always give opportunities for participants to talk either in small groups or in the large if they chose. While we are Christ centered the images of God are varied and inclusive.

For many it is the one safe place they can explore their relationship with God without fearing they are likely to be judged and their experience labelled as wrong.

On the wall of my room I have a poster of a rag doll being pushed through a mangle. The words are "The truth will set you free but first it will make you miserable". I know that from my own experience. The freedom of knowing that God is good, does love me unconditionally and wants fullness of life for me is worth all the effort.

I pray that this will be your experience also.

Thoughts

How to Recognise Grace

Marylin Chandler McEntyre

It takes you by surprise

It comes in odd packages

It sometimes looks like loss

Or mistakes

It acts like rain

Or like a seed

It is both reliable and unpredictable

Its not what you were aiming at

Or what you thought you deserved

It supplies what you need

Not necessarily what you want

It grows you up

And lets you be a child

It reminds you you are not in control

And that not being in control

is a form of freedom.

Weavings - July/August 2002. 28

God has more need of our weakness than of our strength. Just as the powers overstep their bounds and become gods, so our power becomes a rival to God.

Marva Dawn

What is Prayer?

Brian Hardie

Prayer is a way of liberating life,
of pulling out the weeds,
of unclogging the mind
of worry, stress and loss.

Prayer warms the spirit,
re-visions the mind,
rejuvenates the soul,
casts the world in a fresh perspective.

Prayer leaves room
for unanswered questions,
for double doubt;
a space to speak up.

Prayer names the world for what it is,
it is a place for honest-to-God thoughts
that we may not dare to express
to another human being.

Prayer feels the weight of truth,
the depth of pain,
the highs of joy,
crying and laughing with the world.

In prayer we name without fear
our experience of life,
the silence of God,
the promise of faith.

Contemplation - a simple enjoyment of the truth
Thomas Aquinas

STRENGTH TO CARRY ON

Barbara Sampson

When the heavy load you give me
makes me feel like Christopher
carrying the Christ-child across a river,

help me to remember
from the burden flows the strength.

When the testing fires
threaten to sear me like Daniel's friends
thrown into the furnace heated seven times,
help me to remember
from the fire comes the loosening.

When the world's brokenness
overwhelms my heart and engulfs my prayer
like fog sweeping in across the hills,
help me to remember that crucifixion's dark night
gave way to a dawn beyond imagination.

In the burden lies the blessing
through the struggle comes the song
out of winter bursts the springtime
offering weakness, I am strong

In the fire the bonds are loosened
though the dark night seems so long
from the burden that God gives me
comes the strength to carry on.

Cast your burden on the Lord,
and he will sustain you.

(Psalm 55:22, NRSV)

RAG & BONE CONFESSION

There are lumps under our carpet
that the hoover won't help
There are cats tied in bags
would be off like a flash
Skeletons in the cupboards
tap tap on the doors
There is nothing hidden
but that's going to get out

So let's get it over with, God

Silence

There's a pile at the foot of the cross
of the things we could do without
Make us glad we brought them to you
who carries away the sins of the world
and grants in their place
pardon and grace
and your call to be following always.

Pattern of our Days.

Wild Goose Publications. 1996. 152.

*This is the root of grace: the dismantling of our power.
Whenever even a little power rises up in us,
the spirit and authority of God
will retreat to the corresponding degree.*

Eberhard Arnold

KEEPING MYSELF SAFE FROM SPIRITUAL ABUSE by *Ruth Sinclair*

For me to take responsibility for my own safety is a huge undertaking. It is also a process where I seem to take one step forward and then slide three or four steps back. Slipping back into old hurt is so much easier than taking steps of healing and responsibility and life. To take any one step in keeping myself safe requires a new framework of belief.

It requires the development of a new conscience. It was those who abused me who were wrong and not me. I was hurt through their wounding and it was right and proper and wise to begin to take responsibility for my own safety and remove myself from harm's way. So easy to write. So traumatic and demanding to put into action.

Step One: Acknowledge that you are hurting, and give the hurt a name. In this article the name is 'spiritual abuse.' Until we acknowledge our hurt and our pain step two is difficult to justify to ourselves. Maybe the best we can say at step one is "I am not coping. I need to get away."

Step Two: Get human help and support to move away from the source of spiritual abuse. I was totally tied into the system and the relationships that perpetuated the abuse. It was impossible to leave.

And it was impossible to stay. It took a huge effort to tell a spiritual director that I needed help. I was going to need the strength and the support of company.

Step Three: Find spiritually safe places and people. I discovered Taize worship as a safe haven. I also found a church that let me sit like a zombie for 12 months or so. But at this stage many people find that they cannot cope with church at all. Give yourself permission to do what you need to do. Go where you need to go. If the beach or the bush are attractive as places to heal your soul go there. God will grace you in your chosen place of safety and healing.

Step Four: Allow yourself the long process of learning the truth: the truth about who was responsible for what, the truth about what is loving and what is not, the truth about anger and the truth about empowerment. Because I loved my abusers it was a long time before a series of nightmares alerted me to my anger and horror at what had happened to me.

It was only as I began to own those feelings that I could begin to deal with them.

Step Five: Develop a new sense of reality that flows from forgiveness. Until I had owned my anger I could not begin to forgive. Until then I was completely unrealistic. I kept thinking that I could go back into the abusive situation and it would be fine. It wasn't. All it achieved was a re-traumatisation. I could not understand this, but it was because forgiveness was yet to be mirrored within me. When it was I was much more able to say, "Forgive, and be wise! Do not deliberately and unnecessarily put yourself back in harm's way." With forgiveness there came a new acceptance of the ideology that led to the abuse. With forgiveness there also came a new acceptance of the person I was who would always find that ideology difficult. God did not require of me that I demonstrate my strength by foolishly exposing myself to a harmful environment.

Step Six: Closely related to the last two steps and probably simultaneous to them is the development of a new self concept. Usually anyone who has been abused has low self-esteem. We have often come to believe what our abusers told us about ourselves. As we move away from the abuse and live towards a new reality part of our healing is also a new reality about who we are. We are loved children of God, who are precious and honoured and valued.

Step Seven: Live in the present. Just as I have been helped by spiritual direction so I have benefited from the constructive creativity of psychotherapy that has helped me name the past and recognise the present more clearly. I have recently found myself re-traumatised by someone who 'pushed my buttons.' It was as if I was back ten years reliving the abuse again. I found myself being sucked down into pain and misery. How to deal with this? I can do two things now that I was unable to do ten years ago:

Firstly, I can remind myself that this present abuser-look-alike is a button-pusher and not necessarily an abuser in and of himself. They are my buttons he is pushing. My memories. So I needed to tell myself that this was only Bob. He was not in the same position of power as my abusers had been, and I was not the same victim that I used to be either. This was 2002 and not 1993.

Secondly, when I had recovered myself sufficiently (with the help of chaplain, tears, coffee, spiritual direction, and several days 'space') I was able to write a sensible letter that confronted Bob. Within ten days I had begun to build a new level of understanding and respect between Bob and myself.

Oh for the day when I can do that all by myself. Without a chaplain. Without tears. Without my spiritual director.

There's a verse in the book of Revelation that tells of such a day, I believe. And until then I acknowledge my wounds and scars and my dependence on ongoing healing and loving support when the going gets tough.

Thoughts

Poem

Sister Ruth SLG

O God, let me rise to the edges of time and open my life to your eternity;
 let me run to the edges of space and gaze into your immensity;
 let me climb through the barriers of sound and pass into your silence;
 And then, in stillness and in silence let me adore You,
 Who are Life - Light - Love -

without beginning and without end,
 The Source - the Sustainer - the Restorer -
 The Purifier - of all that is...

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4. NRSV

SPIRITED EXCHANGES - a way forward by Jenny McIntosh

was once asked if it was appropriate for the church to be undertaking such groups as ***Spirited Exchanges***, given that it has often been churches which have done harm to those who leave. I responded with a resounding 'Yes, it is definitely the church who should be providing groups like ***Spirited Exchanges***.' When relationships break down, those who are part of the power structure should be the ones to take the initiative and begin the process of reconciliation. Ezekiel 34: 2 b and 4[1] has some strong admonitions to the religious leaders of the day. "...Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ... You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally." In fact the whole of this chapter has some very pertinent things to say on the subject of spiritual abuse, and the safety and care God wants for his people.

Spirited Exchanges is a group that responds to people who come out of churches. The common perception and easy label given to those who leave church is that of 'backslider'. But if anyone cared to follow up on those people they would quickly find that is a 'cop out' term to use. It is a very complex issue and there are many factors at the root of why people choose to leave, spiritual abuse being one of them. The flip side of the same coin is perhaps why some people who should leave for their own health do not.

Making the decision to leave is often a huge step, with many things to consider. Things like:

- the amount of a person's life already invested in the church - the greater the investment , the harder it is to walk away from
- taboos around leaving not being the done thing
- the loss of a community and often close friendships
- a sense of being misunderstood
- the feeling of aloneness and isolation
- the fear of where this is all going to lead, what is happening to me? am I losing my faith?
- feelings of loyalty
- if there are children, what will happen with them?

And yet, the sense of freedom, new perspective and self empowerment on the other side can make it the beginning of a new period of growth, of personal and spiritual development that was possibly never dreamt of.

One man who had become involved in the leadership of his church suddenly found that he had to conform to the party line even when he disagreed. When he challenged that he was told that

they (the leaders) were the chosen authority figures and that "you can't disagree with them." Over a period of time he felt he was pushed into a position of having to comply and in the process felt he lost himself and God. Separating himself from the church gave him the freedom to be able to process what had gone on for him, both from the perspective of what the church was doing and his part in it. He was able to see things in a new light and went on to say: "the conflict served as a catalyst for a lot of healthy thinking about what was happening to him and his own expectations."

A middle-aged woman said: "my confidence was totally undermined and I was made to feel inadequate and useless, that I didn't have enough faith. The church preached all the right things - love, tolerance of other churches, women in leadership etc, but the outworking was different."

These comments give credence to the words of David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen in their book *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*. "Whatever the case, the results of spiritual abuse are usually the same: the individual is left bearing a weight of guilt, judgement or condemnation, and confusion about their worth and standing as a Christian." [2]

Spirited Exchanges is held in a Wellington 'bar and café' on alternate Sunday evenings between 6.30pm and 8.30pm. It is in the style of a 'discussion forum' and designed specifically for people, like the man and woman quoted above, who have left more conventional church structures or are struggling to remain in them. It is for people to process what has gone on for them in churches and enables ongoing exploration of the Christian faith. People are able to express the doubts that once they might not have dared to, re-examine a lot of what they have been previously taught or expected to believe without question, express emotion and even utter the 'heretical.' It is through this real and honest exploration, sharing their stories and grappling with what it all means, that people come to a place of deeper understanding and definition of what is important for their faith journeys for the future. We aim to make the discussions not just academic exercise, but rather based in how they impact the group members personally. The topic for the evening is introduced by someone either with the telling of a story or some questions for reflection. There might be more than one side given to the topic, then it is opened up to the group for a free ranging conversation.

The main aim for such an evening is to create a safe space that allows people to do the work they need to. In order for that to happen there are some basic ground rules - that we are not trying to produce one answer that everyone must adhere to, there is freedom for differing views and opinions, there is no neat 'tie-up' at the end, there is freedom to change their opinions from week to week, and we let God defend God. M. Scott Peck in his book *The Different Drum* describes such a space as "a safe place precisely because no one is attempting to heal or convert you, to fix you, to change you. Instead the members accept you as you are. You are free to be you. And being so free, you are free to discard defences, masks, disguises; free to seek your own psychological and spiritual health; free to become your whole and holy self." [3]

This is the number one, key component for people finding their way forward. It is only in the atmosphere of acceptance and validation that a person has the freedom to say what they need to, and that then enables them to view it objectively and change it if and when they want to. They are no longer in a defensive position which only serves to shut people down.

This is the fourth year **Spirited Exchanges** has been running and each year one of the first topics we look at is that of spiritual abuse, that being the one that we feel will have the most resonance with people. A lot of people identify with aspects of abusive systems in their church experience. The topics are chosen with input from the group and often these 'givens' in the church, such as Who is God? Prayer - through new eyes, Church - what's it all about anyway? What is heresy? Is there a special plan or is life a random series of events? These are very relevant to the leaver as they help to re-form what is important for them.

It is through the sharing of thoughts and experiences around different topics that the group receives validation of their experience, understanding of the different factors coming into play (including faith stage development), what is going on for them, acceptance for who they are and stimulus to reframe and continue on in their spiritual journey.

One leaver, after attending *Spirited Exchanges* for some time said: "After leaving church about a year ago, the only thing I really knew was that I didn't want to be part of a church like that again. It left me with many questions about what church should be and what I wanted it to be for me. I wondered whether I would ever be able to find anything that I could fit into, or even if any such group existed. *Spirited Exchanges* has become such a group for me. I feel free there to relax and just be me, without having to measure up to anyone else's idea of who I should be or what I should believe. At *Spirited Exchanges* I feel valued and accepted as I am'.[4] This person now receives regular spiritual direction, attends spiritual retreats and workshops, belongs to a post church home group and occasionally makes forays into a church. Every aspect of her life has received new energy and confidence. She has taken a new career path and after reconstructing her faith would say that it is now much more balanced and integrated.

A young couple said of *Deep Stuff*, the young adult equivalent of *Spirited Exchanges*, "it was like the paralytic in the story in Mark 2[5], whose friends lowered him down through the roof to where Jesus was. We could not get to where God was through the normal doorways, but by going through the roof we were able to find Him and continue on in our spiritual journey."

There is the opportunity for those who come to *Spirited Exchanges* to remain relatively anonymous. A number have chosen to give us their first names only. There is also the offer of one-to-one support if that is wanted and we promote spiritual direction as a good next step. We have a growing resource of books and articles that may assist leavers on the journey, including a bi-monthly newsletter with helpful articles and reviews that has an increasing mailing list throughout the country.

We do not have the agenda of getting people back into the church. That choice is entirely up to them. We do seek to 'fund'[6](and by that I mean provide resources and support) people to continue in and find greater integration in their faith journey.

If any one would like to know more or to receive the newsletter please feel free to write to PO Box 11551, Wellington or email: spiritex@xtra.co.nz

Footnotes:

[1] Ezekiel 34:2-4

[2] David Johnson & Jeff Van Vonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, Bethany House Publishers, 1991

[3] M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum*, Arrow, 1990

[4] Also quoted in my article on Spirited Exchanges in *Reality* magazine, Dec 1999/Jan 2000

[5] Mark 2:1-5

[6] I first heard this term used by Dave Tomlinson, author of *The Post-Evangelical*

SPIRITUAL ABUSE OF GAYS AND LESBIANS by David Clark

Have you ever thought what it feels like to have your identity as a person made in God's image judged by two or three Scripture passages?

Have you ever had the experience of having to own to a different sexual orientation to the bulk of the population, and certainly the majority of fellow Christians, and to find that that is constantly judged and, in many instances, condemned.

And imagine what it's like to have assumptions made about one's sexual behaviour based on myths and stereotypes that few outside the churches hold today.

Have you ever thought what it feels like to have your journey of faith, or the validity of your call to ministry and your ordination, constantly questioned and even denied as legitimate?

For a pastor or spiritual director to respond to the disclosure of homosexual orientation with scriptural condemnations, or to be met by horror and disgust, can be profoundly disturbing for the Christian lesbian or gay man coming to terms with their sexuality in the context of their

faith. Equally disturbing are responses which appear pastorally sensitive, compassionate and concerned, but have as their basis the conviction the homosexual is a wilful sinner needing repentance, is sick and needs healing, or is possessed and needs deliverance.

It seems to me that spiritual abuse arises from ignorance of the origins of homosexual orientation and presuppositions about the behaviours of homosexuals. This can include discredited myths about gay males as child sexual abusers and as predatory, as well as a morbid fascination with what gays apparently 'do' in bed. The word used to describe this response is homophobia.

Often used pejoratively, the term actually describes a deep-seated psychological reaction to and fear of (hence phobia) homosexuality. It can reflect an internal struggle with ambiguities in their own sexuality by the person responding. It is not uncommon for this 'internalised homophobia' to be found in religious leaders who respond judgementally and spiritually abusively to lesbians or gays under their care.

A most damaging form of spiritual abuse is to refer gays or lesbians to a programme claiming to 'change' homosexuals. It is damaging in that just as someone is coming to terms with their sexual / relational orientation, this is challenged by a programme which actually is notoriously unsuccessful. It is unsuccessful because it attempts something as unnatural as trying to turn left-handedness to right-handedness, or to change the colour of someone's eyes. Such programmes are based on flawed interpretations of scripture and psychology.

The disclosure of homosexuality ('coming out') often arises from a long internal struggle with one's own internalised homophobia. The churches are largely (justifiably) not perceived as safe places in which to be known as gay. Someone choosing to disclose their struggle with or acceptance of their sexuality needs to be treated with utmost sensitivity, and with deepest respect both for their integrity and psychosexual spiritual journey and also for their courage and trust in making this disclosure.

Sometimes the disclosure is made by someone seeking pastoral or spiritual help with their struggle to accept what is true for them.

Sometimes it is made when the orientation has been accepted. In either case, the disclosure is often made anticipating a negative, judgmental response.

The positive, non-abusive response will include assurance of love (from the pastor, and from God) and acceptance, of respect and trust, of willingness to walk with the person and to learn what is important to them in this newly disclosed aspect of their being. A speedy removal of someone from a position of church responsibility negates any verbal assurances of love and acceptance. Prying into or insistence upon behaviours in someone's private life ("are you celibate?") beyond what is disclosed in the course of a non-judgemental, trusting pastoral conversation is invasive and abusive.

In New Zealand, where homosexuality is increasingly normalised (the popularity of TV's "Six Feet Under", gays and lesbians in positions of national and civic leadership), and despite decades of enlightened biblical, pastoral and spiritual scholarship, the churches are the least safe and most abusive places for gays and lesbians. It behoves any with pastoral or spiritual direction responsibilities to educate themselves in order to change this unhealthy climate, so this significant minority (many of whom have given up any hope of finding justice and acceptance in the churches) may find a welcome home.

TWELVE STEPS TO RECOVERY FROM SPIRITUAL ABUSE FOR GAYS AND LESBIANS

1. Admit you have been hurt by religion

2. Turn to God as your guide to recovery
3. Examine your faith
4. Face and deal with your anger
5. Avoid negative people and churches
6. Face the Scripture used against you
7. Find positive supportive Scripture
8. Read and study the Gospels
9. Come out and accept yourself
10. Develop your personal support system
11. Learn to share your faith with others
12. Become a freedom missionary

Rembert Truluck at www.truluck.com.

Each step on the website
includes suggestions and
how to's.

Thoughts

PRESENCE OF LOVE

Margaret Dunn

Presence of Love
Gently embracing,
Tenderly accepting,
Redeeming of past,
Healing of hurt
Deep to my core.

Presence of Joy
Bringing transformation,
Changing attitude,
Delighting soul,
Gladdening heart,
Inviting to dance.

Presence of Peace
Calming fears,
Freeing bonds,
Soothing agitation,
Contenting heart,
Healing mind.

Presence of Grace

Transforming life itself,
 Redefining priority,
 Clarifying perception,
 Inviting wholeness,
 Recognizing gift.

Jesus did not resign himself to spiritual abuse. He stood up to it. He demanded change. Why should we do less? ... Jesus was so focussed on the problem of spiritual abuse that it was only the social evil against which he ever developed a platform. It was the only cultural problem that he repeatedly exposed and opposed. This is amazing when we recall that his culture was plagued by a host of serious social ills. Jesus took no public stand against slavery, racism, class warfare, state-sponsored terrorism, military occupation or corruption in government. He spoke not a word against abortion or infanticide, homosexuality or the exploitation of women and children. ...

The modern church has spoken against each of these Surprisingly, until recently we have said virtually nothing about spiritual abuse, the one social problem Jesus himself seemed to care about most.

Ken Blue - Healing Spiritual Abuse. 17-18

BLIND MOUTHS & SICKLY SHEEP:

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH

by *Mary Concannon*

Corporate fraud, murder and rape, genocide, racism, sexual and physical abuse - what dismal reading the media headlines often make. They are designed to catch our attention. They also serve to illustrate that injustice makes news and is commonplace. Spiritual abuse seldom finds its way into the media but nevertheless is another example of injustice. The root cause of spiritual abuse and for most forms of abuse is a misunderstanding of the nature and wrongful use of power.

Human beings are by nature, social. We are built to be in relationship with other people and we normally find our fulfilment in such relationships. Healthy human interactions rest on respect for the dignity and rights of each person. This respect is intimately tied up with the proper use of power.

Power is morally neutral. The choices we make regarding its use are the sources of its moral inclination.[1]

It is important for those of us who minister to realise that irrespective of the nature of our ministry, we hold power. This is because those who come to us for ministry surrender certain aspects of themselves that need special care. This surrender entails relinquishing control and leaves the parishioner vulnerable. (For convenience I shall call all the recipients of ministry, parishioners.)

Of course the parishioners may not realise fully or even partially what is happening. They may see themselves as equal to the minister especially if they have other relationships. For example they may both be members of the same sports club or they may serve on the same committee.

While this ignorance on the part of the parishioner is regrettable it is nothing short of dangerous in the minister.

Denying, rejecting or ignoring the real power we possess (as ministers) disempowers God's ability to work through us [2]

We must also remember that power and vulnerability are relative and contextual. This is because power is a measure of the minister's resources compared to the parishioner's resources. For various reasons the minister has greater resources. Foremost among them is that of a role, particularly if the minister is ordained. As the leader of the worshipping community the minister, priest or pastor, even in this egalitarian age, is still accorded much of the honour accorded to his or her predecessors at a time when the parish was often largely illiterate and society in general held authority in awe. Besides this, all forms of ministry today usually require quite explicit training and study. In matters pertaining to ministry the minister is thus more highly resourced than the parishioner. Additional resources may be the minister's age, gender or race.

In a different context of course the parishioner may well have greater resources. He may hold a public position in a town where the minister resides. She may be the principal of a school at which the minister's children attend.

These overlapping relationships can be confusing for both minister and parishioner. They can in themselves lead to a violation of boundaries, those limits that allow for a safe connection between minister and parishioner based on the latter's needs. Such violations are often small and usually not malicious. The broken boundaries we are dealing with here arise from the wilful denial, rejection or ignorance of the minister's power spoken of by Writhe.

The power differential between minister and parishioner gives rise to the potential for all forms of abuse. We could say that this potential is greatest for spiritual abuse since physical abuse is usually more obvious and we now have a heightened awareness of sexual abuse. In some ways it is the cruellest form of abuse since explicitly or implicitly the parishioner comes primarily to the minister in the expectation that he or she will be formed in the image and likeness of Christ, that the act of ministry will somehow deepen their relationship with God. The Christian church has always believed that ministry irrespective of its forms exists pre-eminently for the spiritual formation of those to whom it ministers. Christian writers have often been scathing in their denunciation of ministers who are negligent in their duties or who, worse still, misuse their position. "Blind mouths," the seventeenth century poet John Milton calls them in *Lycidas* and goes on to describe the result of their negligence:

*The hungry sheep look up and are not fed
But swol'n with wind and the rank mist they draw
Rot inwardly and foul contagion spread.*

Strong words! Doubtless Milton would not hesitate to use them today to describe those who manipulate their pastoral position to satisfy their desire for power.

What steps can we take to prevent spiritual abuse? Perhaps the easiest is for parishioners to develop an awareness of its possibility. Because of the respect and trust traditionally accorded to ministers, parishioners often do not suspect its existence - until it has happened, that is. Put simply, we need to be less gullible.

Parishioners also have the right to enquire if the minister is receiving supervision and if possible to avoid those who are not. Supervision is one form of accountability and can help keep the minister honest. This presupposes of course that the minister is being honest with the supervisor.

The minister can also ensure that he or she is not a "blind mouth". There is an old adage: to minister to others we must first minister to ourselves. Those who minister to their own spiritual needs are much less likely to abuse others spiritually. A regular pattern of prayer, attendance at retreats and receiving spiritual direction can keep the minister in good spiritual health. Other dimensions of health need consideration too. Taking time off to attend to physical, social and intellectual and emotional needs are not optional extras for the minister but essential for his or

her well being. Parishioners who regard these as luxuries in the life of a minister are asking for trouble. Indeed placing unreal expectations on the minister can be a contributing factor in the incidence of spiritual abuse.

The Gospels have much to say about the right use of power and reflection on them from this perspective can be beneficial for all of us. Here are some examples. Jesus denounced the Pharisees, often in very graphic language, for what can sometimes be described as spiritual abuse. He also knew the invidious lure of power. Luke records (chapter 4) that in one of the three temptations the devil offers him "the power and the glory of these kingdoms" (verse 6). Jesus did not fall for this temptation and as his followers, neither should we. It is fitting we should let him have the last word here:

Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve
[3]

Footnotes:

[1] Wirth, Stephen. *Presence* - International Journal of Spiritual Direction, January 1999, p.31

[2] Wirth, Stephen. *Ibid.*

[3] Matthew 20:26-28

LIFE FIXER OR LIFE SERVANT by Robert Schmitt

This chart looks at and compares the attitudes and actions of leaders who operate out of a life fixer stance with those who work from a life servant stance. It's rather illuminating.

(From "The Spiritual Director as Life Servant" in *Presence*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1995, p.29)

	LIFE FIXER	LIFE SERVANT
ROLE	Assess and intervene	Discern and cooperate
MODEL	Medical / scientific	Contemplative
GOAL	Mastery, control. Make things happen	Serve and cooperate with
DANGERS	Intervene to quickly	Intervene too slowly or not at all
DEVELOPMENT	Linear	Circular
LOGIC	Divide and conquer; either ... or	Synthesize and unify; both ... and
METHOD OF OPERATION	Compartmentalize and separate	Combine and see the overall picture
POWER THROUGH	Personal knowledge, technology	Faith in and contact with the divine
ATTRIBUTES	Rigidity	Flexibility
VALUES	Answers and definitions	Questions and paradox
RESPONSIBILITY	The leader	God

SPIRITUAL ABUSE: A RESEARCH PAPER by Jeannie Cochrane

Introduction

Spiritual abuse is a relatively new term but the practice it defines is probably as old as civilisation. The available literature on spiritual abuse, which generally comes from the USA, has been written in the last ten years. In New Zealand, awareness and emerging evidence of this issue has occurred over more recent years. Spiritual abuse appears to be a significant problem facing the Church. Curtis Hinds,[1] speaking from ten years involvement in international

ministry, considered spiritual abuse the number one sin committed in the church. Some authors [2] have written sequels to their books on spiritual abuse after their earlier books prompted a huge response from people identifying with the material. Even in talking to a small number of people affected by spiritual abuse[3], I was made aware of the serious impact, and the growing numbers affected in my own city. Unfortunately there appears to be an inability on the part of abusive leaders to see the destructive impact they have. Two leaders referred to by respondents were involved in what I consider to be serious situations of abuse, yet they continue to be invited to speak at Christian gatherings nationwide.

Defining Spiritual Abuse

All the definitions of spiritual abuse in the literature involve the use of *power* or *authority* to *manipulate* and *control*. The authority is often a leader but may be, for example, from a church board towards a leader, or a system such as a set of beliefs or a way of doing things which doesn't allow for individual freedom.

Richard Gula uses Rollo May's[4] continuum of power to illustrate how power can be used to control and dominate but it can also be used to liberate and empower others. "The moral challenge is to see that in our interactions with others, the right use of power moves away from dominating others through exploitation and manipulation, and that it moves towards liberating others through nutrient and integrative acts of power." [5] In spiritual abuse, power is exercised in ways which restrict rather than develop another's freedom.

Spiritual Abuse in Practice.

Nicki[6], who is in her early thirties, was attending a Christian training centre offering a number of courses. During a chapel service, people were asked to break into small groups and pray regarding a situation. Nicki and five others from her course, formed a group and although the background music was particularly loud, which made it difficult to hear each other's prayers, they persevered, with different members of the group feeling they had leading from God as they prayed. As the prayer time came to an end the leader of this centre walked towards them from the other side of the room and "launched in, no questions, just both barrels blazing." He proceeded to bombard them very loudly with what they experienced as verbal assault, most of the time gesticulating at them with his finger. He told them, among other things, that they had a spirit of rebellion, a critical spirit, and a religious spirit. He criticised some group members for having originally sat at the back of the chapel, telling them Satan would pluck them off. After further verbal tirade at the group, he turned and walked away, leaving them in varying states of confusion, shock and distress, wondering what they had done to precipitate such an outburst. Members of this group recognised the total inappropriateness of the leader's actions and over the following days initiated procedures to talk with him about what had happened. In a subsequent meeting, which involved all members of the course to which the prayer group belonged, the first thing that took place was the leader reading Phillipians 2 v 1-18. Used in this setting, Nicki and others experienced the passage as silencing and disempowering. The leader also expressed some concerns about this class in general, and when asked for specifics, would only say that they were not enough in the spirit, because if they were, they would see things as he did. They were also astonished to learn that what had triggered his outburst in the chapel was that they had been instructed to *stand* and pray and, as none of them had heard this said, they sat. This had been interpreted by the leader as an act of direct disobedience. In spite of the fact that they communicated to him their unawareness of that specific instruction, he still justified what he had done, saying that God had told him to do this and Jesus would have done it that way. Nicki told him she felt confused because he was saying God told him one thing, whereas she was feeling God was saying something very different to her, and asked what she should do with that discrepancy. His reply? "It comes down to this honey, I'm the teacher, you're the pupil. Judge for yourself."

This situation highlights several aspects of spiritual abuse.

A. Control through position.

Abusive leaders tend to set themselves up as an ultimate authority. They consider themselves to be God's authority, with an ability to hear God's voice not available to all Christians,

interpreting any difference of opinion as a challenge. One respondent quoted a senior pastor under whom he worked as saying “ If anyone has a different opinion from me, someone will have to go and that someone won’t be me.” Such leaders often become increasingly isolated from those they lead, including fellow staff members. A respondent told of working with her husband in youth and pastoral ministry for five and a half years, yet the senior pastor spoke to her on only about ten occasions.

B. Physical and psychological manipulation.

Physical gestures such as shaking a finger and speaking in a loud voice become means of intimidation and control. Using a place such as this chapel service can cause those on the receiving end to feel publicly shamed and humiliated and sends strong messages to those witnessing it about how to avoid a similar fate. Fear, as in “Satan will pluck you off”, is used to manipulate. A respondent told me she and her husband were instructed by the senior pastor under whom they worked to tell people who wanted to leave their church that they would be out of the will of God and who knows what would happen to them.

C. Denial of a person’s spirituality

Abusive leadership treats others as spiritually inferior to themselves, makes shaming responses about another’s spirituality and fails to recognise the ability of another to hear God for themselves.[7]

D. Use of religious language

In spiritual abuse the Bible can be misused, with passages used in isolation and out of context for the leaders own purpose. The use of phrases such as “God told me” and “Jesus would have done it that way” become totally disempowering.

E. Performance based spirituality

Spiritual abuse can happen when spiritual disciplines and belief systems are used to make others live up to a spiritual standard. External performance then becomes the means of proving how spiritual a person is. Jeff VanVonderen says this shows itself as “understanding that behaviour can’t initially gain God’s approval (saved by grace through faith) yet living as if spiritual growth from that point on depends on personal effort.”[8] Curtis Hinds explains it as a change from “come as you are” to “come as you are and we’ll change you to who you are supposed to be.”[9] This problem is not new! Jesus warned his followers to be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16 v6) and in Matthew chapter 23 we find out how much value they placed on external appearance. Paul’s letter to the Galatians challenges them to return to the Gospel he preached to them, after certain people had maintained that it was necessary to adhere to some Old Testament laws, especially circumcision, in order to be a follower of Christ. The implication becomes that the more you do and the more you know, the more God will be pleased with you and bless you. I believe it is important to reflect on what is being added in our day to the gospel Paul preached, on what are the “heavy loads”[10] being placed on people’s shoulders. One respondent said in her church she “felt a lot of pressure to perform, the sermons were often around praying harder, working harder, serving more and especially giving more.” In this system, any personal difficulty one has can be solved by doing more spiritual activity. Coupled with this, I believe, is the often unspoken belief that their way is the right and highest way. If a person is unable to find meaning for themselves with that particular approach they can be made to feel a lesser Christian who needs to repent, try harder, or get their priorities right.

Who Are the Abused?

While no one is really immune, there are characteristics which make us more vulnerable to spiritual abuse. These include a strong need for affirmation and approval, a prior distorted image of God, a background of previous abuse and a difficulty understanding the concept of grace. When these attributes combine with a strong desire to please and serve God, the likelihood of submitting to spiritual abuse is increased.

A group who seem to be particularly vulnerable are those who could generally be described as in the process of making or having made the transition from Fowler’s third to fourth stage in their

faith journey. It is my observation that some in this category find themselves experiencing symptoms of spiritual abuse without having been the recipient of the more obvious kind of abuse as experienced by Nikki. Alan Jamieson says "The transition to the fourth stage of faith is probably the most difficult to traverse and involves the greatest dismantling of what was learnt and experienced in the previous stage." [11] It seems that the effects of trying to do this dismantling in a non supportive or even hostile environment can impact a person quite deeply. It may not be immediately clear to the one making the transition exactly what is happening for them. They notice that the old ways of doing things no longer seem relevant or meaningful for them, yet their faith community holds these things as sacred fundamental and even non negotiable to the life of a good Christian. Expressions of doubt may be quickly silenced. It can be a very confusing and isolating time for the journeyer. During this process I believe it is the system rather than an individual which becomes abusive for such a person. There may be some who would hesitate to call this abuse. However, I believe it can be very important for one suffering from symptoms of abuse to be encouraged to recognise and name it as such for the purpose of moving through it and finding healing and freedom.

Who Are the Abusers?

There will be as many different reasons people abuse as there are abusive situations. However, some common threads are a deep seated insecurity, fear of failure, lack of relational skills, and a wrong or unbalanced understanding of the truth of God. Abusive leaders may use others to fulfil their own needs and make them look successful. It appears to me that they are lacking in self-awareness.

Effects of Spiritual Abuse

Juanita and Dale Ryan say "Spiritual abuse is the kind of abuse which damages the central core of who we are." [12] Several respondents expressed their ongoing difficulty in trusting their own reality. One said "It challenges all that you are and all that you know. It destabilises the very foundation of your life." Consequently, every area of a person's life can be affected. Those who spoke to me or completed the questionnaire typically referred to a wide variety of effects, as listed below.

Physical

- high blood pressure
- chest pains
- trouble with eyesight at stressful times
- physical exhaustion
- general deterioration of health
- stomach churning, sweating at the thought of involvement in activities such as going to church or reading the Bible

Social

- lack of ability to trust people, especially those in authority, both in and out of the church but also extended to Christians in general, with a cautiousness in social interactions
- loss of friendships due to people taking sides or false information being circulated by the abuser
- loss of friendships due to pressure of ministry commitments leaving inadequate time for socialising
- withdrawing socially because of feeling so empty

Emotional

- very low self esteem
- feelings of inferiority, shame, not measuring up
- guilt because of inability to perform to expectations
- deep depression

- strong feelings of anger, resentment
- loss of confidence in capabilities as a person
- fear that what was said will happen to those who walk a different path may actually come to pass
- suicidal feelings

Spiritual

- serious disillusionment with Christianity, resulting in considering dumping it
- close relationship with God stripped away
- confusion about what God required
- questioning own ability to hear God
- thinking something must be wrong with them spiritually
- lack of freedom to worship in own way
- disillusionment because what appeared to be God's will for their life was destroyed

I found that while spiritual abuse resulted in a significant struggle in relationship with God for some respondents, others had a strong sense of God and experienced relationship with God as carrying on separately from the abuse. However, this did not mean that the effects of the abuse were minimal.

Spiritual Direction of the Spiritually Abused

I believe spiritual directors have a lot to offer to the spiritually abused in their journey of healing. However, I wonder whether more needs to be done to increase the profile of spiritual direction in the wider Christian community in order that those who could benefit from such a ministry know of its existence and how to access it.

I offer the following thoughts for directing those who have been spiritually abused. They come from my reflections on comments made in interviews or questionnaires, and my own experience as a directee.

- 1) Seek to know the love and compassion of God for yourself and the directee so as to provide a loving and safe environment.[13]
- 2) Be aware that trust is a significant issue for victims of spiritual abuse. It may take time for the directee to build up a good level of trust to both tell their story and uncover and express their deeper feelings.
- 3) Recognise that a directee may be fearful about speaking of their experience. Phrases such as "touch not the Lord's anointed" and shaming messages about unloving thoughts and attitudes may have been a strong part of their background. Gently give permission and encouragement to talk.
- 4) Listen sincerely to the directee. Seek to respond with understanding to their story, acknowledging the emotional impact and validating their experience.[14]
- 5) Make allowance for the fact that some of what are considered to be basic spiritual disciplines, for example Bible reading, prayer and church attendance may have become so enmeshed with the abusive system that they become toxic to the victim of spiritual abuse. Be open to other ways a person can nurture their relationship with God at this stage of their journey.[15]
- 6) Be sensitive with the use of God-language. Some language may have different layers of meaning for the directee and may trigger unnecessary resistance.
- 7) Encourage the directee to begin to listen to their own inner thoughts and feelings. Positively reinforce expression of these and guide the directee away from automatically judging them in a negative way.

- 8) Be careful that the directee does not come to depend on the director as an authority figure, replacing the previous abusive one. Over time, help the directee develop their own inner authority and a growing confidence that they can hear God's voice for themselves.
- 9) Help the directee question that which has been taught to them in God's name. Where appropriate, offer Bible passages that broaden an understanding of God, for instance those about love, grace and rest. Books which speak of relationship with God in new ways could also be helpful.[16] Distorted images of God which may have resulted from teaching and experience may also be addressed in this way. Books specifically about spiritual abuse may also help increase their level of understanding. (See bibliography).
- 10) Some abuse victims may need professional counselling in place of or alongside spiritual direction. Supervision will be important in making any decisions here.
- 11) Listen to and be open to the Spirit. Hold this directee as a much loved and valued person before God and be open to how God may choose to be uniquely at work in the process of divine healing.

Final Comments

As the level of awareness about spiritual abuse continues to grow, there will be increasing numbers of people who recognise themselves as being affected. My reading indicates that the abused are much more likely to arrive at this understanding than the abusers. It is my prayer that both the spiritually abused and the spiritual abusers will find their way to ministries such as spiritual direction and begin to move into the healing and freeing love of God.

Footnotes:

[1] Curtis Hinds is a Canadian who considers himself to have been both an abuser and abused. He gave a seminar entitled 'Coming Out of Spiritual Abuse' several years ago. I was told this seminar was sponsored by Victory Christian Church, Auckland. I managed to obtain a copy of the tapes from that seminar but in spite of two phone calls I have not been able to confirm the venue or the date.

[2] Jeff VanVonderen, Ronald Enroth.

[3] Interviewed four people, received questionnaire responses from a further four people, and spoke to two counsellors who have worked with spiritual abuse victims.

[4] Rollo May, *Power and Innocence*, pp. 99-119, cited by Richard Gula in *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, p. 85.

[5] Richard Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, p. 86.

[6] Not her real name. The description of the event that took place however has not been altered.

[7] At a further meeting to try and work through the situation, Nicki told the leader she felt he had spiritually raped her with his response to her question. She told me that it took the most precious and central part of her life and spirit, and if you "take away my direct line from God ... I die."

[8] Jeff VanVonderen, *When God's People Let You Down*, p.123.

[9] See footnote 1.

[10] Matthew 23:4.

[11] Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, p.127.

[12] Juanita and Dale Ryan, *Recovering From Spiritual Abuse*, p.9, cited in Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, p. 15.

[13] Curtis Hinds says that we have been used to dealing with our problems by teaching about it. He says you cannot be exhorted, counselled, preached or shaken out of spiritual abuse - the only way is to be loved out of it. I agree with him that being loved is central to the healing process, but I also believe that at appropriate times it can be helpful to have some input which allows us to look at what abusive leaders and systems have taught us from another perspective. It can be necessary to challenge the truth we have lived by to see if it really measures up with the fuller picture of God's truth. SO it is not about a choice between love or teaching but about love permeating everything that takes place.

[14] Nicki spoke of her need for validation, but commented that she did not want just blind validation. She wanted someone who would help her explore what happened, help her to know how she got to where she was, how reality was perceived, where right and wrong was. She saw this as helping her to learn from this experience. While this is a constructive long term goal, I suspect some abuse victims may initially be too fragile for this more explanatory approach and their prior need may be simply to be listened to and believed.

[15] For instance, enjoying God in creation, the use of art and music, journalling, meeting with a trusted friend for sharing and encouragement.

[16] I have found authors such as Sue Monk Kidd, Philip Yancey, Henri Nouwen, Joyce Huggett and Joyce Rupp to be helpful here.

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THE SIMPLE ENJOYMENT OF THE TRUTH by *Anne Oakley*

was driving home from the Ohope retreat, nearing Lake Rotorua. I looked across the lake toward Ngongotaha and was absolutely stunned by the extravagant, raw beauty of the sky at sunset. It was like the freedom of a child's painting - indiscriminate, profuse colour.

I smiled and said: "Oh God, you show-off!"

It seemed so over-the-top, a wonderful exhibitionism.

I really took pleasure in the surprise and lavish beauty.

The next day, I was sitting on the window-sill in our bedroom enjoying the sun on my back, when I noticed the sunlight had hit the bevelled edge of the mirror on my dresser. The strong light was refracted and dispersed in a wide band of intense rainbow - a brilliant ribbon of colours shot from one side to the other.

"There you go again!" I laughed to myself.

I had a sense, again, that God was showing-off for me and was enjoying my delight in noticing it.

That evening I spent some time just watching the play of light on the stretching arms of a cherry tree in our garden. The low, setting sun moved and changed and subtly painted the bare

branches. It was lovely to notice it and just be with it, be with God in the warmth and gentleness of the evening sun.

These experiences gathered in me a heart understanding of Thomas Aquinas' description of contemplation as "the simple enjoyment of the truth".

A TAUTUKU BLESSING by John Bruerton

The edge-of-the-world character of the coastal Catlins, in south Otago, with its dramatic geology, diverse rain forest and prolific birdlife certainly created a unique environment for a good retreat in April 2002 - but it was an enhanced appreciation of silence that I took home with me.

Our Western culture does not generally value or welcome silence - Woody Allen at one point in the film, *Love and Death*, says "Give me an answer, God ... just a few words ... at least a cough!" And in church we prefer ritual action and cerebral activity to silence. Worship is what we do, with the aid of a minister, so silence is all too often an embarrassment and a threat. We seem to be dependent upon programmed noise, activity and busyness.

At Tautuku Bay I discovered that silence is both a presence and a vehicle for contemplation just like wind, tides and light. Within the Christian church bread, wine, water, fire are natural elements and bearers of religious rites. Silence too can become a sacrament yet, like the Arabic numeral zero, it can so easily be undervalued and interpreted as emptiness or nothingness. In reality both are key players in human affairs.

Neurologists tell us that the human brain is receptive to chemical and electrical impulses. These can be uniformly as well as unpredictably expressed. If we believe we are creatures of the earth, as opposed to exiles from heaven, then it follows that the Creator can enter and penetrate the "territoriality of our humanity" (P67 Scott Cowdell - *A God for this World*). In other words, the psyche is the womb of all divine activity.

God *speaks* within the opportunities and limitations of all created life and humanity thus reinforcing their viability and integrity. It is in silence and solitude that spiritual formation and re-formation can occur which is why Retreats ought to be a priority for all of us.

In his book, *Making All Things New* (P67) Henri Nouwen reminds us of the need to cultivate obedient lives in which there is some freer inner space where we can listen daily to God and to follow his prompting and guidance. Nouwen goes on to point out that the word "obedient" comes from the Latin word *audire* - to listen (*auris* - ear) which has significant implications not only for our spirituality but our marriage vows as well! Finally, the Gospels tell us that while Jesus, during his ministry, taught in the synagogue and the Temple it was not primarily there that he met God. He met God in the wilderness and in the streets. "Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life" (Nouwen). Tautuku was blessing.

A STIMULATING LUNCH BREAK by Jo White

At the Marva Dawn conference on spirituality held at Carey Baptist College in September a note was posted on the whiteboard inviting anyone interested in prayer or contemplative gardens to gather for lunch (12.9.02). Eighteen people showed up, and 45 minutes of rapid sharing over a cuppa and a sandwich revealed a depth of diversity of interest.

Ruth Rosser shared how on retiring from their nursery business, she and her husband Erec had the inspiration to create a prayer garden - a place to be, rest, pray and retreat. In February this year they opened Peacehaven in Riverhead, northwest Auckland. It is open anytime and they have a place people can stay within the precincts of the garden. They have linked up with the Quiet Garden Movement (QGM) and when in Britain visited a tiny garden, which none the less

was a place of prayer and retreat. They have found QGM very supportive. The organization publishes a magazine once a quarter which has relevant literature and suggestions for prayer.

Erec has planned a Labyrinth in the garden which will open later this year.

Albany Presbyterian Church is a member of the Quiet Garden Trust and is planning to develop a garden in a gully at the back of the Church property in conjunction with North Shore City Council Parks Department. Close to Massey University's

Albany Campus it is hoped it will provide a prayerful place for students as well as the public and local Churches.

Andrew and Margaret Dunn have five acres at Albany heights of which three and a half acres are in native bush that merges with a reserve. They have two houses on the property which cater for retreats. Bush tracks are still being cut and sitting places developed. Andrew noted the importance of creating appropriate seating for each different spot. "Different things happen in different places" he said. One seat has become known as the Seat of Redemption due to an experience there by a pray-er. Another person on retreat named a part of the bush the *Bush Cathedral* which includes a stand of nikau palms which one looks up into by lying back on a specially constructed seat. He said that the power of such places can be remarkable.

The Crawshaw's have developed a city garden which is enjoyed by visitors as a safe place and haven of beauty in the city. Children in particular were mentioned as enjoying their garden.

Agnes Sturt has roses that have been planted due to their names - *Compassion, Mercy, Amazing Grace, Peace, True Love, and Remember Me*. Agnes personally introduces garden guests to each rose.

At the very end, we had time for a few rushed questions and thoughts. Does space dictate the garden or vision? What significance should be placed on the fact we are gardening in Aotearoa, in terms of planting natives, design, etc? The joy of people going in and seeing God meeting them face to face. The beauty. The priestly mantel worn by the garden caretaker, the daily walking and prayer. The sense of call.

It was a stimulating lunch break in a busy week!

Thoughts

AVE

Robyn Parkin

Shining timber and bright metal -

Beautiful and deadly:

Jesus Nazareus Rex Iudaeorum.

I am aware of the smooth wood.

Subtle patterns gleam in beads

Silky from nights seeking stillness.

("Hail Mary, full of grace")

Sudden, shocking space,

- A gap in a child's smile -

Fills with glory

("The Lord is with you.")

And a growing awareness of Another.

("Blessed are you among women")

Solitary bead.

Solitary Man of Sorrows

Alone in an olive grove

Sweating blood ("And blessed
Is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.")

The second decade rolls

Smooth under my fingers.

Words drop away

As a door opens into a new place

("Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners")

Crisp as a mountain:

A prairie in a bead of time,
("Now and at the hour")

Strung into infinity

("Of our death")

And beyond.

YOU CARE
Anna Johnstone

You care, God

You care

Sometimes we think

you don't

That we're all alone

unwanted

unloved

forgotten

But you feel

every pain

every loss

every sigh

Your heart

beats with ours

and you long

to strengthen

faltering steps

Courage us, Lord
to face you again
so that the heat
of your love
melts the ice
of our despair

Unlock us
from the chains
of distrust
Lead us
through the shadows
till the colours
of your truth
shine freedom
in our hearts

- 23 September 2002

LONELY FLAME

Ross Kingham

Why the clutter?
The filling of every conceivable
Even the tiniest
Crevice
That could provide space
For the echoing of the Word,
The deepest shedding of light?

Why the starving flame
In dampened stained glass glow?

So many fine words
And sentiments.
Such symbolic movement and colour,
Even a tall candle lit
(A brief moment of dramatic effect
In a busy programme),
And the choir, puffing, in full flight.

Yes, it was a fine service of worship.
Everyone kept insisting it was so.

And, afterwards,
A friend
Blinking back tears
Breathed to me a prayer of agony
For which
I think
In worship
There had been no room.

How the Holy One must weep
At the stifling,
The One who would, if allowed,
Light candles
Sitting close,
Sharing the load,
Imparting joyful strength
To souls
Desiring flame.

Whispers JBCE 1994
Used with permission

COME TO US
Mikki Buckland

Jesus, pure light in the wilderness,
love among the jagged, broken things
of people, healing touch on their sores,
power, infinite, to change worlds within
and without,
come to us in our brokenness,
amid the rubbish and remnants of our dreams
and show us the way home.

POSTER

IDEA

Careful!

Humans being!!

Do you think
anyone is going to be able to drive
a wedge between us and Christ's love for us?
There is no way!
Not trouble,
not hard times,
not hatred,
not hunger,
not homelessness,
not bullying threats,
not backstabbing,
not even the worst sins listed in Scripture. ...

None of this
fazes us because Jesus loves us.
I'm absolutely convinced
that nothing -
nothing living or dead,
angelic or demonic,
today or tomorrow,
high or low,
thinkable or unthinkable
absolutely *nothing*
can get between us and God's love
because of the way
Jesus our Master has embraced us.

Romans 8:35-39. The Message.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SUBTLE POWER OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Recognising and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority Within the Church.

by David Johnson & Jeff VanVonderen

Bethany House, Minnesota, 1991. 235pages

Reviewed by Sue Pickering

his book is the foundational reference for much subsequent treatment of the topic of 'spiritual abuse', Johnson being the person who brought the term into contemporary language after struggling to make sense of the destructive phenomena he had witnessed as pastor and counsellor to many victims.

By reflecting on Matthew 23 and providing anecdotal accounts from people directly affected by spiritual abuse Johnson and VanVonderen explore three areas.

Spiritual abuse and its victims gives an overview of a spiritually abusive system; identifies what makes it attractive to spiritually hungry people; points out how to recognise abusive leadership and offers help for those who cannot leave the abusive system.

Abusive Leaders and why they are trapped focuses on the central power figures in the abusive system - the leaders- by examining Jesus' confrontations with the spiritual leaders of His day - the 'collision of *grace* versus *spiritual performance*'. Topics include false power and authority, image is everything, the mundane becomes essential, adding burdens to those who follow, closing doors to God instead of opening them.

Post-abuse recovery offers hope and counsel for those who have been victimized by any form of spiritual abuse; provides guidance to determine whether or not an abusive system can be changed, and whether or not to stay within the system to change it (*fight*) or to leave for a safer spiritual climate (*flight*). Recognising spiritual traps, renewing the mind and recovering the right focus, are followed by a list of 'reminders' from the heart of God, the first three being:

"God loves us a great deal."

"He is extravagant with His grace"

"He can be trusted"

Throughout, Johnson and VanVonderen emphasise two things:

firstly that they are not seeking to blame the perpetrators, but to inform and empower those who are caught in a spiritually abusive system, whichever side they are on; secondly, that Jesus calls us - not to be swallowed up in a legalistic, performance-based interpretation of the Gospel - but to rest in Him and to learn 'the unforced rhythms of grace'.

Two paragraphs near the end of the book show how our understanding of 'sin' can contribute to spiritual abuse:

If I use drugs, steal or commit adultery in an attempt to meet my needs, it is sin. What makes it sin is *not* that I performed a behaviour on the "bad list" - although I did do that. The sin is that I tried to draw life or significance from something that could not give it. Instead of trusting God, I trusted a false god. That is missing the mark.

If, on the other hand, I teach a Sunday School class, serve on a committee or put money in the offering in order to validate myself or earn approval from God or someone else, it's also a

sin. What is a sin about it, however, is not that I didn't do behaviours on the "good list" (because I did do them). It's that I tried to draw life and significance from something that could not give it. Instead of trusting God, I turned to a false god- *positive-looking* but false just the same. That also is missing the mark. (p.210)

The Christian life is, first and foremost, a struggle to simply and purely "trust in God", to continue to rest in what God has done and promises to do.

"Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For my yoke is easy and my burden light and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11 : 28)

HEALING SPIRITUAL ABUSE

How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences

By Ken Blue :

InterVarsity Press, 1993.

166 pages \$25.95

Reviewed by Sue Pickering

Ken Blue's book enables us to ground our thinking about spiritual abuse firmly in the wisdom available to us through Scripture and the example of Jesus.

Addressing important questions such as 'What is spiritual abuse?', 'What kind of person abuses spiritually?' Blue comes to the rather startling conclusion that 'Jesus was so focused on the problem of spiritual abuse that it was the only social evil against which he ever developed a platform...the only cultural problem he repeatedly exposed and opposed.' (page 18)

The core of the book is made up of five chapters devoted to an exploration of Matthew 23, in which Blue shows how Jesus exposed the Pharisees' misuse of authority; challenged their false teaching; identified the characteristics of those who imposed religious burdens on others; revealed their motivation; and described their misguided focus on the unimportant while neglecting issues of consequence.

Blue identifies two types of people vulnerable to spiritual abuse - those who believe that God is a perfectionist tyrant and those who suffer chronic guilt, using religious works to assuage that guilt. He then describes two types of spiritual abusers - the leader who seeks significance by exerting power over others, and the 'heroic, grandiose, messianic narcissist' who is obsessed by the desire to be someone great or do something unprecedented for God. The common denominator between abused and abuser, Blue asserts, is shame, and he provides a helpful exposition of the relationship between the law and shame by examining the teachings of Paul. Concluding chapters give us some guidelines by which we can assess healthy church leadership and discipline.

Throughout Blue reminds us that the mature Christian life is not a mixture of law and grace, but **grace** alone as we receive the blessings won for us by Jesus' work on the cross.

HEALING SPIRITUAL ABUSE & RELIGIOUS ADDICTION

By Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Dennis Linn. Illustrations by Francisco Miranda.

Paulist Press, 1994. 168 pages.

Reviewed by Sue Pickering

Briefly describing the effects of institutional expressions of spiritual abuse, the Linns' focus is more on helping individual readers recognise the behaviour and attitudes which make them vulnerable to religious addiction and spiritual abuse, and providing helpful material to encourage healing.

The chapter 'Sexual abuse and God the Mother' may challenge some readers. In it the Linns use the term 'sexual abuse' more broadly than we might be accustomed to and struggle with wanting to 'tell the truth about how severely religious practices and teachings can damage our sexual identity' (p.37) while at the same time being 'sensitive to victims'. A personal account of how God 'reparented one of the authors, helps the reader understand both the depth of hurt and how God might meet the individual's need for healing.

The Linns reinforce the writings of others who believe that the core emotion in both abuse and addiction is shame i.e. 'a toxic debilitating core sense of being unlovable and inferior as a person'. (p.43) The central chapters explore four learned patterns of handling shame, linking these roles with groups of people in Jesus' time who seem, to the Linns, to be 'stuck in shame-based roles': thus we read about the responsible Pharisees, the rebel Samaritans, the lost Essenes and the distractor Sadducees.

In line with other books by the Linns, useful sections at the end of each chapter encourage the reader to engage safely with any issues which might have surfaced. There is also a section of Reflection Questions appropriate for use with small groups, as this book could well be used as a resource for parish or spiritual direction groups wishing to tackle this tricky topic.

(Note : an unillustrated version of the book is published in Britain under the title HEALING RELIGIOUS ADDICTION - Reclaiming Healthy Spirituality. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995. 150 Pages.)

TRANQUIL MOMENTS: the poetry of prayer

Brian Hardie. Steele-Roberts, Wellington, 2002. pp104. \$25.00

Reviewed by Warren Deason

Eugene Peterson once wrote that pastors and poets were allies: "(They both) use words with reverence, get immersed in everyday particulars, spy out the glories of the commonplace, warn of illusions, attend to the subtle interconnections between rhythm and meaning and spirit." (*The Contemplative Pastor* p155).

Brian Hardie, parish minister and poet, has recognised this allegiance. His collection of some one hundred prayer-poems comes out of his rubbing shoulders with the commonplace, moments of joy and loss, moments of conviction and question, moments for ourselves and moments for others. Brian offers these poems/prayers as works in progress, each of us can carry on in our words or lack of them. They are offered to allow us to connect with the Holy that is in the most ordinary.

These prayers can be used liturgically and are organised with the rhythm of worship in mind: gathering, offering, confession, and intercession. They can also be used for private reflection. This is an engaging and thoughtful collection - a book all pastors could usefully own. If, as some have suggested, most of us have at least one novel buried inside us, then maybe this collection might encourage every pastor to find a poet buried there too.

Prayer feels the weight of truth,
the depths of pain,
the highs of joy,
crying and laughing with the world.

In prayer we name without fear
our experience of life,
the silence of God,
the promise of faith. - from Introduction: What is prayer?

Tranquil Moments is available from the author, 5A Truman Road, Christchurch 8005.

LYING AWAKE

by Mark Salzman

Knopf. New York 2001.

Reviewed by Marg Schrader

This is an elegantly simple book. The sparseness of the prose and the simplicity of the writing style provide a container for the external simplicity of the life of the Carmelite monastery. The reader becomes quickly immersed in the day today life of prayer and work, along with the much more complex inner life of the central figure

Sister St John of the Cross with her mystical experiences and the powerful headaches that accompany them.

Questions arise about faith and doubt, the reality of religious experiences, the relationship between body mind and spirit.

A wonderful novel for all interested in the spiritual life.

GROWTH: TRAINING VS. TRYING

A booklet in the *Pursuing Spiritual Transformation* series from Willow Creek Resources by John Ortberg, Laurie Peterson & Judson Poling from Zondervan Publishing House, 2000

Reviewed by Neville Jackson

Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago has provided a more than useful resource for spiritual growth with this Bible Study booklet. Written in language more at home at the start of this Millennium the authors describe and provide exercises in the classical spiritual disciplines. Each week of the 'study' opens up to the modern reader the disciplines of Scripture Meditation, Solitude, Praying as we can, the Examen, and the Desert. The series ends with a week on the theme of love. The booklet is written for readers to be part of a group. There is background reading and questions for study and reflection by each participant, which are considered individually over a week. Once a week the group meets to support and encourage each other. There is a guide for the group leader.

The aim of this series of 'studies' is to aid the participant in a spiritual transformation that enables her/him to live like Jesus would in their context.

The first 'study' in the module, "Training to live like Jesus" sets the foundation and assumptions for the rest. In it we are invited to consider the image from Jesus' metaphor of the vine and its branches (John 15:1-10).

There Jesus says that only one thing is needed to live as he did - "remain in me." With this phrase the authors conclude that living like Jesus is the result of training, not trying. Hence Scripture Meditation, Solitude, and Praying are presented as exercises for training to remain in Jesus.

While this booklet may well appeal to followers with little or no knowledge of the Church's traditions and practices for spiritual formation, followers at home with the classical terminology will also find a resource of much worth. I believe that this would be a useful booklet for individuals and small groups pursuing spiritual growth. It requires some daily attention from users, and the dynamics of group sharing would cement the personal learnings.

I used the booklet as a resource for service material. The introductory article, the study questions and the spiritual exercises all proved to be

useful in weaving a service that not only provided information, but which also offered the opportunity to practise what was preached.

"Growth" is a useful resource for both the traveller and the companion in this life fulfilling journey of living like Jesus would.

Willow Creek Resources have recently released a comprehensive multimedia series on spiritual transformation called, "An Ordinary Day With Jesus".

From my experience of "Growth" I look forward to what it offers.

Thoughts

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul ... it is a Light Within that illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of others. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And he is within us all.

Thomas Kelly - Quaker.

*Anything that limits
the freedom and fullness of the Gospel in us
is spiritual abuse.*

Anon

*Humility is creating space
for another's individuality to be expressed*

Anon

SGM News

Our Workgroup meeting in mid September brought another significant change with the appointment of Andrew Pritchard of Paraparaumu as Convenor, replacing Andrew Dunn who had been in that position for 14 years.

Andrew P., as we know him, has an engineering background, lives in the Shalom Christian Community and worships at *Pilgrims at Kapiti*. He sees himself as post denominational, works as a spiritual director and supervisor and teaches in spiritual formation and leadership. With Lynn his wife he grows calla lilies as an interest and income.

Andrew brings to this work many years of journeying contemplatively as well as excellent administration skills. Alongside his appointment goes the development of more portfolios within the Workgroup.

Andrew D. hopes to have oodles of extra time for writing and focussing on the Oasis Retreat and Study Centre at Albany.

The Training Programme has had a good year. The applicants for next year's intake are being interviewed around the country, and from overseas. It looks like there will be a sizeable group

for 2003-04. We approved the change of name of the Programme to the SGM Spiritual Director Formation Programme.

The new issue of *Refresh* focuses on spiritual abuse and adds a significant contribution to the growing literature and discussion on this very important dynamic in so many churches and groups. The *Refresh* theme for our Winter 2003 issue will be "forgiveness" and we invite articles, poems, and pieces from a contemplative point of view, and also book reviews on this theme.

The SGM story is ready for publishing. Anne Hadfield has done an excellent job and we hope to have *Uncharted Tracks* available early next year. "Thankyou" to all who have contributed material and photographs for this 21st birthday project. Thankyou also to Anne for the work she has put into the research and writing. We hope to keep the price around \$20.00 a copy.

This year has brought some important changes to SGM's administration and leadership with Carole Hunt's shift to Plimmerton and Andrew Pritchard assuming the role of Convenor from Paraparaumu as well as the training programme's relocation to New Plymouth a year ago. Please pray for us as these changes are bedded in.

We commend our **Friends of SGM** appeal to you again as we seek to maintain our funding base for the increasing costs of maintaining our work.

BOOKS

Jeannette Bakke

Holy Invitations - Exploring Spiritual Direction

Baker Books, Grand Rapids. pp287. \$50.00. Explores the nooks and crannies of the spiritual experience model of spiritual direction.

Dave Burchett

When Bad Christians Happen to Good People

Where we have failed each other and how to reverse the damage.

Pp 243. \$32.95

Marva J Dawn

Joy in Our Weakness - a gift of hope from the Book of Revelation

Eerdmans Pub. Co. Grand Rapids. Revised Edition 2002. pp220. \$19.95

Marva J Dawn

Reaching Out without Dumbing Down - a Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time

Eerdmans Pub. Co. Grand Rapids. 1995. pp316. Rethinking worship and liturgy.

Marva J Dawn

Powers, Weakness and The Tabernacling of God

Eerdmans Pub. Co. Grand Rapids. 2002. Here Marva expounds her view that the basic thread of the N.T. is a theology of weakness rather than of power.

Kathleen Fischer

Transforming Fire - Women Using Anger Creatively

Paulist Press. 1999. pp200 \$42.00

Rob Frost

A Closer Look At New Age Spirituality

Kinsway Publications 2001. pp120. \$25.95

Explores the spiritualities emerging in our world and suggests a deepening of our own.

Brian Hardie

Tranquil Moments - the poetry of prayer.

Steele Roberts. 2002. pp104. \$25.00

Carolyn M King

Habitat of Grace - biology, Christianity and the global environment crisis.

Australian Theological Forum, Adelaide. 2002. pp235. \$44.95

Ron O'Grady (Editor)

Christ For All People - Celebrating a World of Christian Art

Pace Publishing, Auckland. 2001. pp 159. \$50.00.

A wonderful presentation of 20th Century Christian art from around the world, including the Pacific.

Eugene Peterson

The Message - The Bible in Contemporary English

NavPress. 2002. \$69.95. This is the complete edition of the whole Bible.

Margaret Silf

Soul Space - Making a Retreat in the Christian Tradition

SPCK 2002. pp162. \$42.95

CONTRIBUTORS

John Bruerton of Christchurch is retired from school teaching.

Mikki Buckland, poet and painter, lives in Bayswater, Auckland.

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Sue Pickering of New Plymouth is an Anglican priest, spiritual director and SGM's Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme Co-ordinator.

Barbara Sampson is a Salvation Army officer living at Trentham where she works as a spiritual director and writes the Salvation Army devotional guide **Words of Life** which is available in bookshops and supermarkets.

Marg Schrader of Palmerston North works at *Still Point*, is a spiritual director and is a past moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly.

Jo White from Hamilton works in a garden centre and is completing a masters degree in spirituality from Regent College, Vancouver. She has designed a number of prayer gardens.

GOD'S TABERNACLING WITH US

I can only confess what the Holy Eucharist means to me. Briefly it is this: That Christ gave Himself to be true Food of my supernatural life. Here I have the actual Presence and self-giving of the living Christ. He who gave Himself for me on the Cross is giving Himself to me as I come to the Altar. Then he gave Himself unto death. Now he gives Himself to me for life, that through His living Presence and Power He may do for me everything that His death made possible for me. In the Holy Communion I have the greatest Realities. It is an unseen Presence, and yet in this unseen Presence there is no mere memorial, but the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension brought down to today, space and time abolished.

Berthold Von Schenk

Acknowledgments:

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