

Foreword

It is some thirty years ago that I was asked to edit a small magazine for an ecumenical charity called the Churches' Council for Health and Healing (CCHH). This charity had a distinguished history, looking back to an initiative taken by Archbishop William Temple in 1944 to bring the churches of Britain to work together in this area of healing and cooperation with the medical profession. Although the CCHH was hampered by lack of resources and eventually closed in 1999, it possessed one important area of influence. Healing charities had the possibility of being affiliated to our charity. In the event that a group became involved in scandal, the Council had the task of removing it from its association with the central body. So, in the 1990s, I was familiar with the idea that clergy and church leaders could on occasion commit abuse in the context of healing activities. I saw the incidence of sexual abuse while offering divine healing as a blasphemy, but the wider Church generally did not want to contemplate this area of evil. The pastoral, theological and psychological resources were not there to deal with it or adequately respond. My studies for a book I was writing at the time, *Ungodly Fear*, showed me clearly that sexual abuse in the Church was common but I saw it only within a narrow perspective. My main insight was to treat it as a misapplication of the power of a few leaders.

In the perspective of the 1990s, I was unable to see this evil of abuse as being deeply embedded within aspects of the Church's own culture. Patriarchy, deference, sexism and negative attitudes towards sexuality inherited from our Puritan ancestors, all fed into the culture that enabled this abuse. Also, no one at that time was predicting the tsunami of cases that surged during the present century. Alongside the (post-Jimmy Savile) awareness that has entered our churches and society in the past ten years, there has also been a vastly improved understanding of the topic within the

academic and professional worlds. The Church itself has, in many ways, lagged behind. While it has started to provide improved training for clergy and church workers to be aware of the issue, it has found it hard to provide adequate care and support for the traumatised cohort of abuse survivors. The Church has also failed to understand how its own teaching and understanding of human sexuality have contributed to the incidence of cases. These failures have impacted negatively on the reputation of the Church. It still remains possible that the damage caused by these institutional failures has been so severe that the trust and respect for the Church held by society at large has been lost for ever.

At one level, this present work by Fiona Gardner is about Christian leaders in the Church of England behaving badly. However, it is much more than that. Three things make this book a product of this decade and not from the period when I was doing my own study. In the first place, Fiona is able to avail herself of three decades of detailed reports about church abuse, much of which can be studied via the internet. The work of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and other reviews have turned over many stones and revealed dark places for which the Church should feel much shame.

In the second place, Fiona has brought into her writing much theoretical background to help the reader understand at a deeper level the phenomenon of abuse, both from the abuser's perspective and the point of view of the survivor. Her commentary is informed by a deep appreciation of the psychological literature, gleaned from her professional training and practice and her reading. I have especially appreciated her insights in the area of narcissism.

The third aspect of her writing, which is helpful to the reader, is the way she locates sexual abuse in its social setting within the Church. She writes, for example, about the role of the British public school and the way that it is one of the social entities that has in some ways enabled and fostered abuse. The Church, by combining institutional blindness, naïve optimism and malevolence in itself, has unwittingly come to be a major part of the problem.

The issue of how the scourge of sexual abuse can be banished in the future cannot be fully resolved in a book of this size. However, there are here the outlines of suggestions and pointers as to what the Church needs to do. In the first place, the Church has to listen to the experts who bring to bear their insights from

other professions and disciplines. Survivors also need to be heard. They continue to suffer years after the original abuse and they demand and expect to encounter a church organisation that understands their experience. So often the survivor is made to feel that he/she is the enemy rather than the one in desperate need of help. Fiona's work points the way towards providing the rounded, holistic approach to the topic that both church leaders and survivors need on their common journey towards wholeness and healing.

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