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Eyes Wide Open: Spiritual Resources for Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Arnold integrates the first section on pastoral awareness into his discussion of specific issues by including a section on the appropriate pastoral response to the situations described. Here he refers to the earlier discussion of boundaries and attitudes, using them as a resource for counseling. In the mine-filled terrain of human sexuality, where church social statements fear to tread, this book offers sage advice to practitioners in ministry—and its first section ought to be a required exercise for pastors and their mentors.

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Eyes Wide Open, Spiritual Resources for Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse

Louise Cummings
Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1994
124 pp. \$19.95

I must admit that I approached this book with a great deal of caution! So many “spiritual” resources that relate to issues around sexual abuse are heavy on forgiveness and light on reality. I wondered if this book could be any different. The need for good material for sexual abuse survivors made reading this book worth a try!

Beginning with the introduction one can see that this is going to be an honest look at a survivor’s journey. At the outset, the author points out to the reader that the chapters are not numbered because there is no “correct” order to the way one would experience them. This underscores the importance of understanding the path a survivor needs to travel in a world that struggles to make everything appear to be linear.

The outline of the book is brilliant in its simplicity. Each chapter begins with a candid description of the author’s abuse experience. Cummings does not dwell as much on the historical description of her abuse as on the impact that it had and continues to have on her.

This description is immediately followed by the question—“Where is God?” In this part, the author draws on her rich knowledge of Old and New Testament passages that have supported her in her healing. She offers the reader those passages that gave her support as she faced each new feeling and experience.

Finally, each chapter ends with the question—“Where is my community of faith?” This is a rich lesson to any of us about the value of cultivating a deep relationship with our faith community. It speaks of the obvious support the author finds in her community. Also, it points out the importance to the community that lives through a difficult experience in concert with

one of its members. Cummings never makes this seem easy: however, she offers a description of a rich experience for all involved.

The chapter titles give the reader a glimpse of the journey: Introduction, Discovery: Horror, Gentleness, Grief, Rage 1, Rage 2, Memories Returning, Honesty, Trust, Forgiveness, Hope, Facing Fears, Change, Conclusion. Browsing through the titles is like scanning a road map on which the only clear thing about the route is the starting place and the destination. This is a graphic description of a survivor's journey.

The illustrations are abstract and subtle. They are almost subliminal on first reading! As the content progresses, however, one can recognize the impact and continuity they offer to the text.

This book is a truly remarkable work. In it the author describes her journey in a way that avoids so many of the pitfalls of cathartic self disclosure. It is rich in imagination as the author tells metaphorical stories to her inner child. It is simple, clear and honest—something remarkable among many other works published about this subject. *Eyes Wide Open* will become a companion to anyone who supports a woman who has been abused. It shows survivors and their care givers how to help survivors integrate their history with their faith experience.

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Dreaming the Tree of Life

Shirley Jane Endicott

Dundas, ON: Artemis Enterprises, 1992

158 pp.

Dreaming the Tree of Life is a collection of stories, poems and songs celebrating the experience of women from a feminist point of view. Shirley Jane Endicott takes her inspiration from biblical themes and from present day life. I can applaud Endicott for examining forthrightly such difficult issues as spousal abuse and rape. "A High Rock" is a sensitive yet frank exploration of one woman's feelings about her attraction to other women and about a specific sexual encounter with a lesbian. Endicott hopes that her book "will encourage other women to create writings which value their experiences of spirituality, find their own truths and expand the process of women-centred myth making" (p. 14).

My reaction to this book is one of respect for the author's creativity. But, personally, I did not find this book particularly nourishing or inspiring. Most of it was at the edge of my comfort level. Discomfort isn't necessarily a bad thing. For it can push me to look at issues that I might not otherwise