

Excerpts

Excerpt from the Introduction

(pre-publication version)

This book addresses the harsh reality of abuse and neglect in our culture. Within psychological circles, this topic ordinarily falls under the rubric of trauma. As we will discuss, trauma is a broad topic that encompasses many forms, intensities, and degrees of hurt. Taking the form of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse and torture, human induced trauma is a special category of trauma. We are suggesting it is best described as an expression of evil.

Moving beyond trauma to evil helps us shift our thinking. It encourages us to consider the powerful forces within persons and our culture that set the stage for potential acts of cruelty against others, without losing sight of the tremendous impact violence and abuse have on particular persons. Such a shift also moves us beyond the psychological and physical dimensions of life to which a focus on trauma can limit us, and into the moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

Some psychotherapists and other caregivers may be reluctant to make this type of shift. We believe, however, that focusing on evil, as we will describe it, offers caregivers a way to understand and intervene in patterns of intergenerational abuse and neglect that provide a nurturing ground for the ongoing cycle of abuse and violence. It also encourages caregivers to take seriously the task of finding the personal resources, beyond their training in psychotherapy, that they will need for this demanding and complex work.

Our focus is on evil in contemporary American culture as it is manifested in and through abuse and violence perpetrated by persons against other persons (human induced trauma). It is our hope that the thoughts and perspectives offered here will be of interest and assistance to all caregivers who work with individual and social problems stemming from violence and abuse, regardless of their professional discipline or faith perspective.

It is not our intention to look at all dimensions of trauma and the healing process. There are many comprehensive resources available for caregivers

who want a thorough grounding in this vast and complex subject. This book assumes a basic understanding of trauma theory.

Neither do we look exhaustively at the subject of evil. Rather, we will present a perspective on evil that grows out of our work with persons in pastoral psychotherapy and our work with caregivers engaged in a variety of pastoral care settings. While we utilize specific examples of evil to illustrate the concepts presented, we are more interested in understanding the process dimensions of evil than we are in categorizing specific acts or experiences as evil.

The professional perspective from which we come at this task is that of pastoral counseling and psychotherapy. This means we are committed to integrating contemporary theories of psychotherapy and human development with resources offered by Christian faith and theology. We seek to do this in a manner congruent with our particular identities and the way we practice our respective vocations. This book is an attempt at that type of integration.

As psychotherapists who work with people in outpatient contexts, we spend a good deal of our time working with the internal mental worlds of those who come to see us. In this complex endeavor, we welcome the wisdom and traditions of theorists that help us understand from a scientific perspective the richness and sacredness of these internal dimensions of persons. As pastoral psychotherapists, we are also keenly aware that we work not only with the minds of persons, but primarily with their souls. Because we believe with others that the soul requires "care" rather than "treatment" or "fixing" (Ashby, Jr. 1997; Ashbrook 1996; and T. Moore 1992), and because the soul requires many forms of care, we have chosen to use the term "caregiver" throughout the book (and make note of specific groups of caregivers only when necessary for purposes of clarity). We also believe the term "caregiver" keeps all providers of care on equal footing with one another as we work together to form a community of care in which to embrace those who seek our help.

The theoretical perspective from which we work is best described as object relations theory as it is informed by self psychology, trauma theory, and systems theory. We like this perspective because it provides a conceptual framework with which to understand the vital and dynamic relationships existing between the inner worlds of persons and the wider social and cultural contexts in which persons develop and live.

Most of our clinical work has been with individuals who have suffered some form of abuse at the hands of others. The concepts and case illustrations presented, however, seek to address issues pertaining to individual, institutional, and cultural dynamics as well. It is our hope that the concepts and perspectives gleaned from our work will be useful to anyone who deals with evil in American culture.

Although we have worked with an increasing number of male survivors, most of the survivors with whom we have worked in psychotherapy have been women. While we are acutely aware that many men are victims of abuse and violence, we have chosen to predominantly use references to the feminine gender. In addition, while what we present will be most directly applicable to working with survivors and will be presented from their perspective, we believe much of what we present also applies to work with perpetrators, and some references to this will be made.

We are aware those who read this book will come from numerous spiritual and faith persuasions. The theological and faith perspectives offered here are personal ones. Although we feel passionate about them, it is not our intent to claim they are universal or representative of the beliefs shared by a wide range of Christian persons of faith.

Excerpt from the Preface

(pre-publication version)

As we begin this journey from trauma into the realm of evil, we want to share our respective stories of wrestling personally with the presence of evil as an active force in the world. This seems particularly fitting, since the material we are presenting grows out of the life stories patients and colleagues have shared with us. In talking with colleagues, we have been repeatedly reminded that our experiences are similar to those of others who have been blessed enough to embark willingly and unwillingly upon this journey into the realm of evil. The value in sharing our stories and respective journeys with one another is that it alleviates the isolation and lack of confidence that can develop within us when life experience of any kind is not shared. With these thoughts in mind, we would like to share how each of us came to an interest in such a disturbing subject as evil. As with most things in life that change us significantly, the evolutionary process has been slow, but constant. While conversion may seem spontaneous at times, there is often a long and tedious preparation process that has operated behind the scene.

It took a long time for the reality of evil to break through my denial. This is not because I lived a sheltered life growing up. On the contrary, in my early life I experienced a fire which threatened my home, the explosion of a building right before my eyes, the death of both a close friend and my father from cancer, as well as the systemic evils of a patriarchal church and sexism in society, the horror of the Vietnam War, racism,

As an adult, I have been exposed to violence, abuse, wars, and other atrocities on a daily basis through sensationally driven news media. In the inner city of Milwaukee where I was the principal of an elementary school, I witnessed the effects of abuse, violence, and prejudice on children and families. I was also personally held at gunpoint, robbed, and left locked in a freezer. And yet, somehow, these experiences did not break through a denial system that kept me believing that people are good and the world is basically a safe place. Or perhaps, I believed somehow I could change it and make it all better if I tried hard enough.

I have always believed that we and those to whom we minister are about cocreation of our world, as well as one another. So it was with my breakthrough about evil. It began a number of years ago when in both my professional and personal life I had my first encounters with persons who suffer from multiple personality disorder (now referred to as dissociative identity disorder). Their shared experiences confronted me with evil in a way that finally broke through my denial system. These were persons who had experienced extraordinary abuse at the hands of their parents and others known to them. The enormity and pervasiveness of this evil overwhelmed me. Initially I was extremely fearful of it. For the first time in my life I felt basically unsafe in the world, and my faith in a loving God was shaken. Since that time, I have struggled to name and understand evil, to understand God in new ways, and discover how I want to respond to evil.

In 1990, on our drive back from a dissociative disorders conference, Jeff and I began talking about evil. At that time, we each identified a personal need to address the issue. We also saw a need for persons of faith to deal with these issues, since few people in our circles of colleagues seemed to be talking about evil at that time. I believe strongly with theologian Elizabeth Johnson, "If God is there, resisting evil and willing life wherever people are being damaged, then followers of Jesus must enter into that same solidarity"(Johnson 1990, 126). I also believe that to name something correctly gives us a certain amount of power over it, even when that means recognizing

evil in all its ghastly reality. When I can name evil in that way, it also makes me clearer about the fact that it is in dedication to "life . . . more abundantly" that I am committed.

It seems to me that it is reckless to think of evil as something "out there" and as something over which I have no control. I believe each of us has a personal responsibility. Part of assuming personal responsibility has meant I've had to face the potential for evil within myself. I have learned that the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, including my own.

With my denial taken away, my eyes have been opened to see the world more clearly, my vision has been broadened, and I can recognize that things are often not what they seem. For example, in my work with a female inmate, I have experienced evil at a local prison. We are persuaded to believe in this country that evil is embodied in the prisoners whom we lock away. However, the evil I have experienced is not in the inmate, for she admits her wrongdoing and is repentant. The evil I am now aware of is in the prison system itself, which treats these women in inhuman ways. Power and control are exercised with no concern for helping them change their lives so they can live responsibly.

It has become increasingly clear to me that in our terrified longing to be in control of the universe, instead of turning our attention to the seeds of evil within ourselves, it is easier to focus on "all-bad" scapegoats like inmates. It is easier to recognize evil in other people, rather than see it in ourselves and in the systems of which we are a part. I am learning that the more I am able to face evil within myself, the more I am able to be with another who has been a victim of evil or even a perpetrator of evil. As theological leaders, our task is to help the people of God understand the experience of evil in the world and determine a faithful response to it.

M.A.N. (Mary Ann Nelson)

Excerpt from Chapter One

(pre-publication version)

Caregivers work on a daily basis with the rending effect evil inflicts on the lives of people. Evil is not a pleasant subject. At the existential level of day-to-day life, evil's unpleasantness makes it easy to flee into the intellectual detachment that the study of the problem of evil (theodicy) affords. We want to

move beyond that detachment. For if we listen closely to the messages people share about the many ways evil has affected their lives, evil takes on a personal and present quality that affects us and beckons for some response from us. Discussions of evil have traditionally taken place within a religious context that includes references to such other topics as sin and suffering. As we set the stage, therefore, for our own journey from trauma into the realm of evil, we want to place evil within the context of key topics generally associated with it.

The Church and Evil

One of the few places evil has been consistently mentioned has been within communities of faith. At the same time, the church and religiously committed individuals have tended to leave evil unacknowledged as a part of their own worlds, and have tended to ignore and deny the depth of evil's impact on people. When evil has been acknowledged, it too frequently is pushed outside. Peter Gomes (1996) states, "One of the great acts of transference in modern times is the transference of the responsibility for evil and sin from individuals to institutions and to society at large" (253-54). Ted Peters (1994) has suggested that mainline theologians have 'lost interest in the internal workings of the human soul' (2), choosing instead to focus their attention on political and economic structures of oppression and systemic forces of evil as seen in various forms of discrimination. In Peters' words: "The evils of our world have been consigned to social forces beyond the scope of our own personal responsibility. Deep down, however, it seems to me that each of us is at least dimly aware of our own responsibility. But when our theological leaders abandon the task of helping us to understand the experiential dynamics of sin, we are left with a symbolic or conceptual void" (2-3).

We also push evil outside ourselves by lodging it in "evil people" who are then summarily dismissed *en mass* as if they have no relationship to the rest of us. The result of this maneuver is that we become co-conspirators in the very evil we seek to address, and we inadvertently contribute to the further polarization of society into good and bad forces. More importantly, we mislead ourselves into believing we are somehow immune to evil becoming lodged in ourselves.

When those of us in the church deny and ignore the potential for evil that resides in every person, we contribute to the church's failure to address evil in its most basic form and to provide leadership in confronting evil. When those of us in the church ignore evil in the world, we contribute to the church's failure to look at all of life, as well as to the church's collusion in propagating the

delusion that the world is only a safe and benevolent place. When the church fails to confront evil at any level, it ultimately robs those touched by evil of the faith resources for which they so desperately long.

This dilemma has not gone totally unnoticed by the church. For example, the 203rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), meeting in 1991, approved a "Study Paper on Family Violence." This assembly authorized the Stated Clerk of that denomination to print and distribute that document to each church, and further urged all its churches to study that paper and establish programs to respond to domestic abuse in their communities. The preface of that document opens with the following scriptural reference, . . . from prophet to priest, every one deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying "Peace, peace," when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:13-14) (General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 1991, 1).

This document goes on to condemn the practice of making domestic violence and sexual abuse "women's issues", rather than issues of concern to the whole church. One result of the segregation of these important issues is that they remain outside regular activities of the church such as theological education, scriptural reflection, liturgical practice, and even worship. Another result is that leaders of the church can more easily avoid addressing these issues - seriously and responsibly - (General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 1991, 1). The preface to this document closes with a call to those who have ears to hear,. . .(and) eyes to see . . ., to act with justice and create a community where the wounds of the people are healed more than lightly (General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 1991, 2).

Evil has also been a topic of concern in the international church community. The 1994 Seoul Congress of the International Religious Federation for World Peace devoted its attention to the presence of evil in the world. In an edition of the Federation's newsletter, Thomas Welsh (1994) noted evil's "ability to emerge universally and with a certain degree of absolute equality" and that "evil is the great obstacle of true unity" (162). Welsh also noted that "one of evil's great accomplishments has been its ability to infiltrate our religious traditions, often undetected" (163). The subtlety of evil's snare was noted in this way: ". . . evil cleverly infiltrates morality, . . . Moralists, both religious and secularist, representing one cause or another, fail to see how, in their own high-minded protest or crusade, they too have been co-opted even as they blush from the accolades poured out by admirers" (Welsch 1994, 163).