



The Bumpy Road to Wellville: Wholistic Treatment for Spiritual Trauma

***Spiritual Crisis: Surviving Trauma to the Soul.* By J. LeBron McBride. Binghamton, N.Y.: The Haworth Press, 1998; 182 pages.**

Reviewed by Michael E. Cafferky

Is the process of joining (or leaving) the Seventh-day Adventist Church traumatic to the soul? If so, what should be the appropriate care given to a person in transition? Are other dynamics present during spiritual crisis than the classical, often-cited battle between good and evil? When a person experiences extremes in religious belief, how should those around her discharge the responsibility to care in a manner that respects the whole person? What attention should the ministry of spiritual nurture pay to the trauma of changing denominational identity? Is religious burnout something more than a problem with loyalty to Christ? Through his own pilgrimage into and then out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (residency at Wildwood Sanitarium followed by graduate study at Andrews University Theological Seminary and pastoral ministry) J. LeBron McBride contemplated these issues. Then, using his professional training and experience as a caregiver and educator of healing professionals, he wrote about surviving trauma to the soul.

If as you read this book you did not know McBride's connection with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, you might remark at how closely his views of wholeness parallel those prized in Adventism. This is no coincidence. As he develops his thesis, McBride acknowledges (without naming Adventism) that his book contains reflections on his own religious experience. Yet he does not take a hostile approach as he attempts to explode the myth that a person cannot be happy and committed to spiritual issues after changing churches.

As important as McBride's own pilgrimage is, the book contains more than a story about a spiritual journey. The book is a competent treatment of the nature and implications of spiritual crisis; it is probably the most comprehensive wholistic study of spiritual crisis published to date.

One of the reasons this book is important is that McBride reveres the sacred, taboo ground of religious experience. McBride's thesis is that spirituality is at the core of physical, mental, and social experiences. Whereas trauma in any one of these areas leads to corresponding spiritual crisis, changes in spiritual life are also traumatic. Care for individuals in spiritual crisis is most appropriate when the needs of the whole person are taken into consideration.

Caring for individuals in spiritual crisis involves a careful process that McBride outlines. *Spiritual Crisis* is written for physicians, counselors, and psychotherapists interested in understanding spiritual dynamics in the lives of clients. The book is also useful in a wider arena for pastors and church leaders who care daily for individuals experiencing changes in religious life.

The task for Adventists implied in McBride's book is to provide spiritual care for individuals in our community in a way that helps them survive spiritual changes. For example, McBride asks, what changes would be made in Adventist evangelism and church growth if the wholeness perspective were used to guide the care of those in spiritual transition? When Adventists talk among themselves about people who leave the Church, what message about spiritual trauma do they give to those who remain? When they warn youth about the dangers of leaving the Church, what do youth learn about spirituality? When Adventists reduce the theology of spiritual transition to a battle between good and evil, between right church and wrong church, do they provide spiritual care appropriate to the need?

McBride's work should spark vigorous discussion in a variety of religious settings, not least among those interested in contemplating how Christian ministry should continue to offer spiritual value to its communities.

Contemporary minds perceive spirituality as something more than pure doctrine and official church membership. Spirituality should be integrated with human life. Consumers want spiritual care that respects integration during times of spiritual trauma, and if they do not receive this in the Church, they will look elsewhere.

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