

**GATHERING NEWSLETTER
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“Snakes in Suits”

Have you ever been “duped” by someone who convinced you that they were something that turned out to be just the opposite of what they really were? Most of us have or are close to someone who has been completely fooled for a time by someone who seemed to be genuine and honest only to find out that they were really a lying, cheating scam artist. Often resulting the loss of money, reputation, a love interest or face. People often don’t even report their encounters with such drifters because of the acute embarrassment it may cause them “How could I have been so stupid?” is their lament.

I have just finished reading the book “Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work” published in 2006 and written by psychologist Paul Babiak, Ph.D. and psychopathy expert Dr Robert D. Hare, Ph.D.

It deals with the nature of psychopaths not in criminal organizations but in the context of normal employment and explains: 1) how psychopaths manipulate their way into work and get promoted; 2) the effects of their presence on colleagues and the people they work for and 3) the superficial similarities (and differences) between leadership skills and psychopathic traits.

The authors are both experts in criminal psychopathy and have developed a screening instrument to help them identify psychopaths in the prison environment. This scale has since been adapted for the corporate world. They maintain that not all convicted criminals are psychopaths – a fairly obvious point – but also that not all psychopaths are necessarily in trouble with the law. In fact they argue that about one percent of the general population fit into the category of psychopath. Many of them can be found in business, politics, education and yes even in religious organizations. But I bet you knew that already. In fact the book talks about the religious fraudster who infiltrates the local congregation, gains peoples trust with all the right words and actions, pretends to have lots of money and sure fire investments. People willingly buy-in and soon the trusted brother has made off with major coin leaving individuals and often churches in very serious difficulty.

Some of the traits of psychopaths are: keen intelligence, disarming charm, no conscience, superficial feelings, no concern or care for the hurt they cause others, manipulation in the extreme, lying (as to their credentials) even about small things, bullying if charm doesn’t work (threatening law-suits as an intimidation tactic), temper tantrums to name a few. They often put people against each other with lies for their advantage. They have an inflated sense of their own importance. They tend to want to completely destroy their opponents not just best them. They want to completely, remorselessly crush them (overkill if you will). They exhibit no accepted ethical

behaviour. For example they have no hesitation in going behind someone's back with fabricated information to undermine or destroy their reputation. One stunning trait of psychopaths is their ability to find our weaknesses and exploit them to their advantage (as in Hannibal Lecter in "Silence of the Lambs). Extreme care must be taken in dealing with a suspected psychopath as in having others present when dealing with such and careful documentation of everything having to do with this person. We also should not be too hard on ourselves when we are conned because even the most proficient professionals are sometimes taken. Does anyone come to mind yet?

While Dr.'s Babiak and Hare warn against glibly labelling people psychopathic, which requires serious expertise, most of us can think of pretty good examples of people we have known who seem to come very close to the profile. I can think of at least three over my career in ministry who showed serious signs of this perversion. I am talking about people in the structures of the church local and corporate not people I have met through Chaplaincy in jails and prisons. The amount of personal hurt and corporate damage such people cause is untold so it is best to be alert to avoid involvement and to protect precious groups from their exploit.

Jesus does warn us to "beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matt. 7:15 NRSV).

Michael Steeves
April 15, 2007

Book Review for April 07 Gathering Newsletter

Making Room by Christine D. Pohl, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999

If you are looking for a study book that has the potential to transform your church "Making Room" by Christine D. Pohl is a good candidate. More importantly though is the subject of the book, recovering the lost art of hospitality in the Christian Church.

Pohl is not talking about graciously receiving family friends or peers she is talking about the ancient custom of welcoming the stranger in our midst. She is talking about how we receive the poor, refugees, the mentally ill or anyone on the margins of society. In doing so we could be welcoming Christ Himself – see Matt. 25 a key passage illuminated in chapter two. The seminal chapter is number four where she states: "Today, some of the most complex political and ethical tensions center around recognizing or treating people as equals. Recognition involves respecting the dignity and equal worth of every person and valuing their contributions, or at least their potential contributions, to the larger community. Struggles over recognition also encompass questions about what it means to value distinctive cultural traditions, especially when a particular tradition has been tied to social disadvantage and exclusion". Hospitality becomes a subversive act when we make it a practice to welcome the "least" into our midst.

In nine chapters of about twenty pages each Pohl covers all aspects of this virtually lost art. From the joys to the struggles, the dangers to the limitations, etc. This book has come to our church at a crucial time when we are working actively with the poor through the food bank, with refugees and

engaging those on the margins through a special project sponsored by KIROS. As we put the principles of hospitality into practice we are already seeing small transformations take place. Stay tuned. One thing each of us who took part in the study plan to do is share the book with another person with the hope of discussing it with them so as to help others to engage in this practice as they are able.

Michael Steeves
April 15, 2007

'Was I reckless? No'

One year ago hostage Norman Kember was dramatically freed by the SAS in Baghdad. In his first newspaper interview, he tells Aida Edemariam why he doesn't regret his journey to Iraq.

Saturday March 10, 2007
[The Guardian](#)

The four men were taken easily, in broad daylight. They were accelerating away from a Sunni mosque when two cars full of armed men cut them off, relieved them of their driver and interpreter, and of their freedom. For the next 118 days Norman Kember, Tom Fox, Harmeet Singh Sooden and James Loney would be chained side by side in an upstairs room in a suburb of Baghdad, deprived of natural light and of any contact with the outside world apart from the grainy videos in which they were forced to appear.

They spent their waking hours attempting to manage despair; their sleeping hours were broken and dread-filled, not to mention uncomfortable - until they found a nail and were able secretly to spring the locks, they were handcuffed together even when they slept. If one wanted to turn on to his side he had to ask permission from the others, a far cry from the spirit in which Kember had

tried to put himself to sleep on his first night in Iraq - by reading Agatha Christie's *They Came to Baghdad*. They took turns being the ones with one hand free, and had to bang on the door every time they wanted to go to the toilet. Eventually their gun-toting minders gave them notebooks, which they used to play word games, write diaries and compose last letters to their families. In mid-February they were told Fox and Kember would be moved to a different house to facilitate their release. Kember was never moved. Fox, an American, was taken away and shot. His body was later found dumped in a street.

This is not quite the way Norman Kember would tell it - or at least, the way he refused to tell it when he was eventually freed by the SAS. He did not behave as we expect our accidental heroes, our insta-celebrities, to behave: much gushing, endless media interviews, story sold to the highest bidder. He refused all except a brief statement at Heathrow and one interview, made sure he reiterated what he believed, that the problem of Iraq should be solved without violence, and sold his book, notable for its refusal to sentimentalize or over dramatize, to the publisher of the Jerusalem Bible rather than Penguin.

He was punished for his noncompliance. He was perceived, wrongly, he says, to have been insufficiently grateful to the SAS, and was denounced in the papers and in hate mail sent to his home in suburban northwest London. "It was really annoying," says his wife, Pat, cradling a cup of tea in their austere comfortable living room. "It didn't annoy me - I expected it," retorts Kember. "If you take a strong stand, you expect people to disagree with you strongly."

One reason he didn't do many interviews when he was released last March, not even to be debriefed by Scotland Yard (he used a

Dictaphone, in privacy), was because the experience had left him prone to tears, and he simply didn't feel up to it. Now, having written the book for - he claims - catharsis more than publicity, he answers questions unflinchingly, defiance punctuated with a side-long smile that if it were in neon lettering would spell QED.

Pat finishes his sentences, sometimes corrects him. There is an obvious love and respect between them, but also an old-fashioned division of labour. Pat, who was a primary schoolteacher, cooks, cleans; he deals with the money, the car, the computer - which made ordinary life rather frustrating for her when he was incarcerated. It is with pride that she says: "He is in control. I have to admire him, because he's so clever, really." Did she not try to stop him going to Iraq? Ken Bigley had just been kidnapped and beheaded - surely they knew the risks? She laughs. "Well, I didn't say very much about it. I wasn't happy, but he's his own person." Then, knowing that perhaps this sounds a little unconcerned, she adds, "I didn't think Norman was important enough to be kidnapped. I did think he could be accidentally killed - that the car could be blown up, or he'd be walking in a market and be blown up, but -" It took her a while to comprehend what had happened, but the day after she was told she felt physically sick.

He may readily admit to doubt, but what is striking about them both is the bedrock of certainty on which they have built their lives: in each other, in their Baptist faith, and for him in particular, a need to prove that his wasn't, in the German resister against Nazism Dietrich Bonhoeffer's phrase, "cheap grace - accepting the solace of Christianity without being prepared for costly obedience". For years, from the comfort of his professorship in biophysics at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine,

and then from retirement, Kember argued that Christianity should support non-violent conflict resolution. Eventually becoming ashamed of that comfort, he felt he should take a risk for his belief.

The captives were strangers until a US-Canadian organization called Christian Peacemaker Teams, dedicated to bearing witness to human rights abuses, and, in Iraq, to reassuring Iraqis that not all in the west supported the war, brought them together in Jordan, then at their base outside the Green Zone.

Clearly the men had diametrically opposed personalities, but they tried. They played games, told each other about their lives, sang, took turns leading Bible study, and nicknamed their captors. Kember drew, without spectacles, the great cathedrals of England, and searched for amusement in the absurd - the old wedding dress Fox found in a corner and added to his bedding, the kidnapper who didn't know the word for kidnap. Sometimes his account reads like a gently disappointed review of a bad hotel; partly he is reflecting the boredom of captivity, but partly it is because Kember, now 75, has a horror of succumbing to feeling. He reacted with fastidious silence to the emotional articulacy of Fox and Loney, and almost skips the confusion and fear that must have accompanied their capture.

It seems to have been an instinctive method of coping. The first few days in particular, he says now, "I've forgotten. I think I've crossed them out of my mind." There are other blank periods. "One of the worst moments was when I was alone with Tom Fox and they took this video of us, in Guantánamo Bay orange suits. Now, I couldn't remember that ... I've watched it - because my son-in-law kept that video. But I couldn't remember doing it." He does remember a peri-

od when he contemplated suicide but couldn't work out a fail proof method, and once, when it became clear they wouldn't be released for Christmas, requesting permission from the others to cry.

Pat, in London, also did not cry much. "I used to avoid people because they were so kind," she says. "When people are so kind you get emotional." Her husband watches her, dark circles deepening under his eyes. He was never, and still is not, clear whether a ransom was demanded; the Foreign Office denies any was paid, but does admit the kidnappers were given time to escape out of concern for Kember's age. The first phone call Kember made home, "I thought he must be ill," says Pat. "He couldn't speak. It was quite frightening. It's the first time I've known him to be that upset." He had to rely on a police officer to say he was OK. He was wobbly the second time, too. But "by the third time, it was you".

Almost the first thing they received was a telling-off from the commanding officer for putting lives at risk. Kember argues, simply, that soldiering entails risk. Did he not think the officer might be right, that he was reckless? "No, I don't think so." How about the cost, which has been estimated at £8m? "Oh yes. Of course I feel guilty about it. That money ... was desperately needed in the health service. But it is a flea compared to the vast amounts of money being squandered on the war - and where's it got us? I'm grateful the Foreign Office decided I was worth rescuing."

Having said which, he's in no doubt that "my biggest regret is the distress it caused Pat. I didn't regret what I did, because I think there's an element in Christianity of being foolish. I think that Christianity is - people say it's countercultural. The idea that Jesus gave up power, and that God is power-

less, is so countercultural in civilizations that revere power. What's Tony Blair about, but power? That's against the principle of Christianity."

But Blair's argument for entering Iraq was based on an arguably Christian idea of humanitarian intervention. Can he not see that Iraqis might not care to distinguish between shades of westerners who think they know what's best for them? "If we really wanted humanitarian intervention we'd go into Burma," he answers. OK, so why didn't he go to Burma? He doesn't answer directly, saying instead that Christian Peacemaking Teams have been invited to the Democratic Republic of Congo, are active in Colombia, and on the Mexican border.

I take another tack. What difference did he think two weeks of his time could possibly make in Iraq? "I didn't think it would make very much difference at all - it was just something I had to do. And I wanted to talk to Iraqi people. I thought that I would come back and tell a story about what life is like in Iraq outside the Green Zone." Whatever the reasons for going willingly into war, those who do have to admit to some level of frisson, to excitement and unparalleled adrenalin. Was that part of it? "I've explained," he says testily, "it was my belief that peacemakers should be prepared to take risks."

But surely it was quite selfish, to go into such a grave situation simply to test his Christianity? "Yes, you can believe that if you like," he says. They both laugh. "It's fair enough. You can question anybody's motives about doing anything." How much does he question his? "I question them all the time. I hope I'm not too hardline. I have doubts all the time. That's what life is about. At least it is from my point of view."

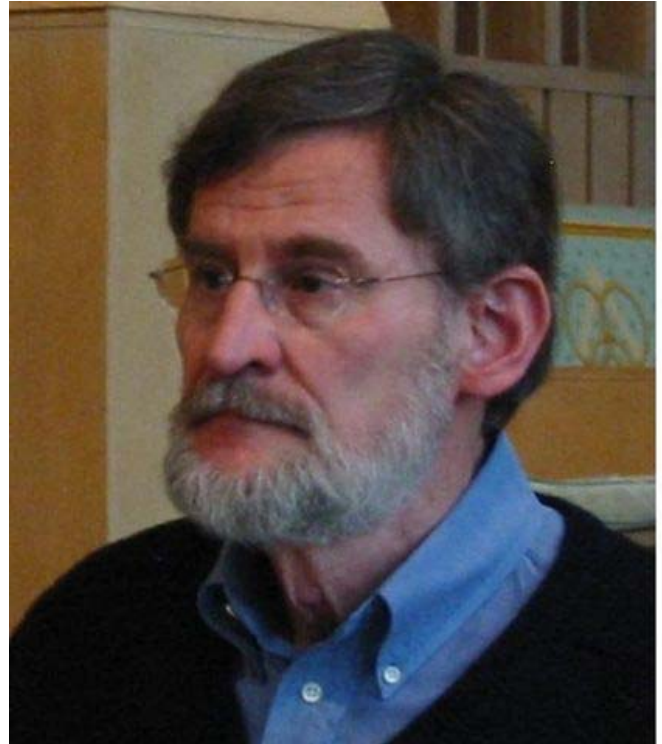
Kember made headlines again just before Christmas, when his kidnappers - a previously unknown group called the Sword of Righteousness Brigade - were apprehended, and he, Loney and Sooden refused to testify in any trial that was likely to result in the death penalty. They also extended their forgiveness. It cannot have been pleasant to be called "Norman 'no wisdom' Kember", and a "silly old fool" in the Sun, for instance, but one thing he has learned is that recognition in the media has its advantages. He gets to elaborate his beliefs about nonviolence and peacekeeping to many more people, and is listened to more closely.

But what if the worst had happened? "Christianity is about being willing to die for your faith," says Pat stoutly. "It isn't about being a martyr - " Norman interjects, but she hasn't finished. Even if he had died, he'd have "done his best to live out his faith. We'd have accepted that the rest of us are weak cowards and that he did the brave thing".

Related article

[10.03.07: Book extract: Hostage in Iraq by Norman Kember](#)

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I have been to Corinth and Colossae with Bill Herzog and I like who I've met there. These are committed followers of Christ, tutored and nurtured by Paul, but they aren't just the happy obedient folk of my Sunday School studies, nor the syncretism- and heresy-resisting saints of my seminary days. These people heard and understood a transformative gospel that called them to see each other, slave and free, differently, non-hierarchically. They had the opportunity to sow the seeds of revolutionary change, to view human dignity as a given, to wrestle with themselves and be blessed. Like we are now that we have journeyed with Bill at our Spring Gathering.

- Cam Watts

Upcoming Gatherings

Summer Fun Day for Families
July 14
Lynden Estate

Fall Gathering
October 27th
First Baptist Church, Perth ON
"Cure of the Soul" with Jean Stairs
"Interfaith Conversations" with
Michael Steeves