



Michael J. Kruger, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the problem of spiritual abuse in the church*. Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan Reflective Publishing, 2022, 164 pages, \$22.52, hardback; \$12.99 Kindle; \$5.95, Audio book, ISBN: 978-0-31013-638-5

This author understands spiritual abuse in the church!

From 1970-1984 I was the recipient of what this author refers to as “spiritual abuse in the church.” Since then, I have been in recovery and have helped many heal from their own unique experience of abuse by those in religious authority. Both my graduate degrees focused specifically on this topic and my first published book was about how religious or spiritual abuse recovery occurs. Like many, I can appreciate what it feels like to have experienced such abuse. Therefore, when a seasoned conservative Christian seminary president and professor tags segments of the Christian church for such abuses, I take notice. When he also gives concrete preventative and corrective actions to such abuse, I want to do all I can to promote his ideas as found in his excellent book.

Just who is he writing for, what does he say and how does he say it?

Briefly - he writes as an insider primarily to those on the inside of the Christian community and to those that are perhaps now outside of the church due to abuse experienced by the actions of church leadership. He intentionally identifies and illustrates such abuse providing noteworthy examples: James MacDonald, Harvest Bible Chapel; Liberty president Jerry Falwell Jr. and Steve Timmis previous CEO of Acts 29 along with others. He does not try to pretend that because a church proports to be “Christian” that therefore they are above reproach and themselves not in need of correction. He makes a winsome case for a well-informed biblical approach that rightfully suggests how both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are very critical of abuse by religious leaders.

The author does not stop at merely identifying such abuse by clergy but provides a straightforward three-pronged action driven approach for churches. There are *preventative* measures to help ensure abuse is rare, there needs to be an *accountability* structure to sufficiently deal with it when and if it does occur, and the church needs to have a well-organized plan of how to *protect and care* for those that may yet be abused.

I appreciated how the author writes in a very readable, well-organized way. He rightful integrates various authorities in the field of religious abuse: Lisa Oakley, Kathryn Kinmond, David Johnson, Jeff VanVonderen, and Kenneth J. Garrett along with many others. He also weaves in helpful information from authors Bessel van der Kolk (trauma expert); Chuck DeGroat (narcissism as found in the church); and appropriate creative quotes from J.R.R. Tolkien (Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit) and C.S. Lewis (the Chronicles of Narnia) and a host of others from history past. If all the above was not enough, his extensive notes of documentation at the end of his book were additionally well-chosen and helpful for those wanting to do more research on this important topic.

Clearly this author is well-read, on this topic he has done his homework, he is brave in expressing his opinions and does so in a creative and very helpful sort of way. It is no wonder that his book is getting a lot of recognition. There isn't a six-star evaluation, otherwise I would gladly give it.

I strongly commend this book for your reading.

Patrick J. Knapp, PhD

Co-director of Becoming Free LLC and author of *Understanding Religious Abuse and Recovery: Discovering essential principles for hope and healing* (2021).