

TOXIC FAITH - A CHRISTIAN BOOK SHOWS HOW BAD FAITH STRUCTURES COMPOSE THEMSELVES

Toxic Faith by Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton (Oliver-Nelson, 1991)

Many believers in religion argue that there are forms of religious faith that are toxic. Many atheists believe that though religion is a bad thing, the reason it is bad is because it is based on religious faith and religious faith is always about what you want to believe and not the truth. Whoever does not care about truth does not care about others much either. If faith is a problem, that gives the critic a way to blame say Catholicism for what Islam does. Catholicism is to blame in the sense that it endorses faith and all the violent Muslim terrorist is doing is putting faith into practice.

Sometimes you expect something to touch a person's good buttons and the opposite happens. Faith could look harmless and be pressing bad buttons if not in all believers but in many of them. What if faith should change people for the better and does not always do it? What if it is faith's fault?

The Christian book Toxic Faith by Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton (Oliver-Nelson, 1991) is very useful. But despite its grand assertions about the dangers of toxic faith, the fact remains that Christianity, the faith it espouses, is a toxic faith and contradicts the book's main suppositions. Manipulative means having a hidden agenda. Christianity is manipulative - it pretends to be pro-health.

People are always taken in by the people in a sect who are seen as good. Any system needs some charmers to take off. Catholicism likes to parade saints and this attracts people to it despite the fact that a few seemingly good people in a system does not make the system good. It is superficial to judge a religion as great just because some of its members are outwardly great and are paraded. The rule might be that religious people would be better people without religion so those saints could be exceptions. There are exceptions to every rule. It is superficial for people of no religion have the same degree of goodness as most ordinary religious people. Good people in a religion never show that the religion is in any way good but they do show that human nature is good. To call any religion good because of the nice people in it is insulting. It is odd how a religion would take responsibility for being inept or a bad influence if most members turned out bad and it does not if the number of bad people is small! It is not a question of statistics!

Jesus was prickly - if he lived - but it seems his followers often did so much good that their religion became a success. The argument that a religion is good if it has mostly good people in it is invalid. Their goodness is human goodness. It is an insult to them to accept their claim that it comes solely from the power of their religion.

There is a dangerous tendency among a few to argue that a religion should be allowed to teach what it wants even if it is pure hatred. But what about the victims? They say that victims should see that it is something in the haters that is the problem and not the religion. The victims then are accused of being unfair if they blame religion or the person as a religious person. It is twisted to protect religion and faith and not people.

Some argue that religion never harms because we are never upset by something another person is or does. What upsets us is how we react.

Those who argue that way are really apologists for evil. Even if we are to blame for being upset, somebody else is too.

FROM Toxic Faith (a summary by B. Jackson)

The following is a summary of the book Toxic Faith by Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton (Oliver-Nelson, 1991) under the heading of The Roles of Toxic Faith. It is part B.

B. The Roles of Toxic Faith summarised by Bill Jackson from the book Toxic Faith by Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton (Oliver-Nelson, 1991).

Introduction

a. A healthy system is made up of individuals with a full range of emotions, intellect, free will and the ability to function independently. In a dysfunctional system, each individual plays out a role needed for the system to function. Since individuals lack the ability to function independently, they depend on one another to play out their roles and allow the system to continue. Those roles have to be played so that those in the system can remain in their denial and avoid the overwhelming fear of insignificance

b. In a dysfunctional system, roles evolve to support the system. Each person must be willing to play the roles which become more keenly defined as the addiction intensifies. Individuals become trapped in predictable behaviours that remove God and faith, replacing them with a dependency on a set of rules. As a person's behaviour lines up with one of these predictable roles, any deviation from that role is a sign of rebellion from the system and is dealt with quickly through shaming and rejection. Although each role is difficult to maintain, it is even more difficult to leave the safety and predictability of the role and act independently. A person who takes this step back toward reality becomes an outcast of the system

c. In a toxic faith system, be it family, church or ministry, the person with the role of persecutor heads the group. The persecutor is supported by co-conspirators, enablers, and victims. These people have one primary function: allow the persecutor to function, insulated from reality. Each person in each role believes the organization must continue, and it is each person's job to distort, manipulate, hide, or deny reality so the toxic system can go on. Each person in a different way protects the persecutor from outside disruptions that could stop the achievement of the persecutor's vision

d. These people create a false reality by distancing and isolating the persecutor from contact with the real world. As they grow more committed to the persecutor and the toxic ministry, they become addicted to the behaviours of the role and the feelings derived from participating in the false reality of the toxic system. Once they stop supporting the false reality that allows the persecutor and the ministry to continue, they are no longer needed by the system and are thrown out

The roles

a. The Persecutor

The persecutor plays the role of the father in the family.

In the church this person is the one with the vision that the organization must continue, and it is each person's job to distort, manipulate, when they were younger and, therefore, don't want to risk rejection as an adult. Rather than trust God and risk being rejected or betrayed by God, they focus on what they do in the name of God and what they perceive are the instant rewards sent from God. In this way they lose all faith in God and rely on their own abilities to find God's favor. The fulfillment of the mission becomes everything for the wrong reason and they surround themselves with people willing to say that the progress toward the goal is outstanding

b. The Co-conspirator

For every persecutor, there is at least one co-conspirator who manipulates, plots, and plans to keep the persecutor in power and position. The persecutor and co-conspirator work as a unit; they operate as one. Both are addicted to religion as the means by which they seem to be the one with the vision that he/she and the others find meaning in fulfilling. Persecutors have often been rejected. Several work together to form a team of "yes-men" that will do anything to protect and defend the persecutor. They feed into the persecutor's ego and further blind him/her from reality. When there is conflict, they usually find a way to agree with the persecutor and support his/her position. They are loyal in every way. In a toxic faith system, these are the most dangerous followers because of their proactive commitment to keeping the system intact. Their undying faith in the persecutor is the reason so many will continue to support that person when trouble, rumour, or admission of wrong surfaces

c. The Enabler

While the co-conspirator actively connives to keep the persecutor in power, the enabler's role is more passive. They allow, more than promote, victimization. They are not active in the decision-making of the organization but willingly support those decisions made at the top. They know something fishy is going on but they don't want to rock the boat by calling attention to it. They are getting their worth serving something "significant," therefore, they purposely don't "see things," thus justifying their enabling activities. The fearful enabler will wait until someone else intervenes. They hope for but are afraid to work for change. Instead, they work like beasts of burden because they feel responsible for everything

d. The Victims

Victims place their complete trust in the leaders of the toxic faith system and become silent victims of something they don't understand. They fear rejection and abandonment so much that they would rather be exploited members of something than be on their own and be part of nothing. Theirs is a blind allegiance

e. The Outcast

This is the only role in the toxic system that is not driven by addiction. In any toxic system, there is usually someone who can see the problem and confronts it. In a healthy system, individuals serving in that organization have respect for the person and position of leadership. For it to remain healthy, there must also be respect for the workers. When there is no respect, the "hired hands" are not allowed to disagree. If they don't like something, they are labelled complainers, negative thinkers, and not team players. The toxic system has no place for anyone who challenges the integrity or disagrees with the methods of the leader. The person who is unwilling to play the games of the persecutors and co-conspirators, becomes the outcast. They lose their friends and church because they stood for their convictions