

Book Review: ***A Spirituality of Survival: Enabling a Response to Trauma and Abuse*** by Barbara Glasson, Continuum International Publishing Group, London. 2009

ISBN: 978-1-4411-9255-4

Reviewed by Catherine Beaumont: PhD student at the Project for Spirituality, Theology & Health, Durham University.



This small book (fewer than 200 pages) explores what it means to survive trauma and abuse. The French root of the verb survive is used throughout to differentiate between those who *sur vivre* by living above their histories of abuse and trauma and those who exist *sous vivre*. The central message of the book is that healing from trauma may be found in speaking about it.

Abuse can be sexual, political or environmental and to develop her argument Glasson uses examples from her work with the marginalised of the UK, including the urban poor, the sexually abused and the elderly. She also draws on her experiences of listening to the stories of communities in South America and post apartheid South Africa as well as spending time in her friend's allotment listening to the Earth.

Those who live *sous vivre* are described as silenced and lost: lost to themselves and invisible to the world. Glasson believes that victims cannot move from *sous vivre* to *sur vivre* without the support of people or communities who will listen attentively to their silence, provide safe spaces and wait for the stories to surface. The process undertaken by the supportive community is likened to that of excavation: of searching for what has been lost. These themes of losing and searching are explored through the narrative of Luke's Gospel. It is in the relationship between the lost and those who search for them that the transformative process is said to begin.

The message, on the whole, is one of hope, both for the lost and silenced and for the communities that are transformed by hearing their stories. Yet, in following Glasson's counsel to listen to what is not being said, I sensed an underlying theme of segregation. It is argued that the local church is not a therapeutic community, and the abused and traumatised are encouraged to go out of their congregations to para-church organisations such as Holy Rood House for significant parts of their healing journey. Victims are seen as separate from perpetrators to such an extent that the Gospels are said to convey a different message to each group. In my experience the demarcation is rarely so tidy, and this book would have been improved by a greater recognition that many of those living *sous vivre* will be both victim and perpetrator.

As a Methodist Minister Glasson writes primarily for the Church, although the methods she describes, of encouraging healing through the telling of stories, could be undertaken by any supportive community.

I would recommend this book to the lost and silenced, to those who wish to journey alongside them and to local congregations who wish to become more inclusive.