

Women of Hope

True Stories of Suffering and Faith

Edited by Linda Baraciolli

LINDA BARACIOLLI presents 24 accounts by women suffering from spiritual and psychological distress, and even anguish.

The publisher's back-cover describes the editor as a writer and full-time mother to two young sons. She has worked as a missionary and youth minister in the Catholic Church in Australia and overseas from Burma to Rome. She is especially passionate about women's issues and, through her work, desires to empower women to move beyond negative situations.

The sort of *empowerment* she means involves Faith, Prayer and Forgiveness. It is opposed to *disconnectedness*, which is a modern problem *enfeebling* many peoples' lives, particularly women. Though she does not quote him, the great Cardinal Newman offered ideas and ideals to overcome disconnectedness: "**I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons**".

This reviewer notes how refreshingly orthodox are her editorial expositions of Catholic faith and practice when unobtrusively she intervenes into the individual stories with explanatory footnotes. They are always apt in their location, in their layout and their content, and are replete with quotes from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In spite of the catechetical and liturgical wilderness which has afflicted so many Catholic schools and parish Masses for 40 years, vibrant faith has survived in many lives and families. To God be the glory.

Her use of Bible texts is also superb, always pertinent and clear. Further, her book is punctuated with references to websites on the internet. As well, she concludes with a **Glossary of Catholic Terms and Where to Find Help**.

This reviewer, however, feels there is "a lack" - as the Irish puts - in the treatment of men, whether as husbands, fathers, priests, and men generally. True, they get honourable mention, for better or for worse, and there is no feminist philosophy, rather femininity. But there is a crying need for **men and boys to be brought up with greater sensitivity and refinement as masculine ideals** which are in no way a compromise with unisex feminism. What is more, wives and mothers can be alerted to the good they can do by patient perseverance in this regard, and by not resorting to usurpation of male roles. Indeed, this has been a vital need ever since Genesis chapter 3...

Maybe there is scope for a separate book to restore the old ideal of a *gentle-man*, because the alternative reality we often experience is simply a brute savage.

Do "unhelpful" husbands correlate with a lack of interest in becoming fathers? Maybe there is a lack of psycho-sexual growth in much family, parish and school formation of boys and young men, and a further example of the failed out-of-family 'sex education', and the failure to support parents and not usurp them.

In a word, doctrinal depth is needed, based on:-

Holy Orders and Matrimony - The Sacraments at the Service of Communion {as in 'the communion of saints'!
- are **directed towards the salvation of others**; if they contribute as well to personal salvations, it is through service to others that they do so.

Catechism of the Catholic Church §1534

In his Foreword, Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, points out that religion is not just a consolation but a strength, especially the strength to give up our own desires to what God wants, He speaks beautifully of the Church's welcome to wanderers who have become homesick...

In her Introduction, the Editor says that the Catholic Christian religion is not just a label but a tool for improvement. Whether it is in her selection of stories or in her prompting of the authors or both, this upward thrust from gloom and defeat to faith and hope is the key theme of the book.

The bald alphabetical listing of themes on p. 17 is itself quite depressing - abandonment, abortion, abuse, addiction, birthing traumas, death of a loved one, depression, divorce, domestic violence, eating disorders, infertility, mental illness, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, relinquishing a child for adoption, and suicide of a child, Similarly the sub-titles of the chapter headings on pp. 5-6,

The book underscores the saying of this reviewer's father: "The bulk of mankind are in the greatest possible need of compassion," and Sir Walter Scott in his Waverley novel *The Antiquary*, that "the next best thing to innocence is sincere repentance."

It is encouraging to hear of the healing work of the new prayer and lay apostolate groups, and retreats and conferences, and the keeping of personal Journals, as well as Mass and Confession, and the Rosary and Novenas, and that basic personal apostolate of good honest charity towards God and towards all men.

Some accounts use the language of pop-psychology and confuse self-esteem with self-respect. On the other hand, evils like immature marriages, heavy pettings and pornography are quietly disowned.

The selected accounts offer understanding for relatives and friends; and for parish priests, and other Christian ministers; and also helping professions like grief counsellors. It should be studied in seminaries.

Women of Hope, True Stories of Suffering and Faith, edited by Linda Baraciolli, Connor Court Publishing Pty Ltd, Ballan, Australia, PO Box 1, Ballan Vic 3342; 2008; 244 pages, **\$29.95**.