

***Mad Church Disease:
Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic***

Anne Jackson
Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2009,
190 pages, \$16.99; hardcover

Reviewed by: Kenneth H. Mayton,
Director, Doctor of Ministry Program
O.R.U. Graduate School of Theology and Ministry, Tulsa, Oklahoma

What a title and how appropriate, *Mad Church Disease* - a title I wish I had thought of. Who can forget the Mad Cow disease epidemic of a few years ago when pictures of cattle carcasses were stacked in a heap for all to see nightly on the evening news. The author sees a parallel between mad cow disease and burnout in the church.

In this short, easy-to-read work, the concerns about burnout in the church are crisply and accurately dealt with. The book has a workbook format and feeling. The book is colorful and contains many charts, illustrations and references.

Early in the volume the author makes the point of comparison between mad cow disease and mad church disease (burnout). The characteristics of mad cow disease are: The disease lies dormant for a given amount of time going unnoticed. It can be a period of months to a few years before the disease is found; it is caused by a mutated protein that attaches itself to the cow's nervous system, thus affecting the cow's brain and responses. The disease is transmitted by cows eating the suspect protein (from remains of other cattle); it ultimately leads to the infected cows' death (pp 30-31). There is no

cure. The remainder of this book addresses the subject of applying these characteristics to the church setting.

Who is Anne Jackson? Information from her website, Flowerdust.net, says, "She is an author, speaker and social change activist who lives in the Nashville, Tennessee area with her husband Chris...Her latest book, *Permission to Speak Freely: Essays and Art on Fear, Confession and Grace* (Thomas Nelson), released in August 2010. Ann has traveled around the world telling the stories of hope found in the least likely places." She is a speaker advocate for Compassion International.

On the back cover is given an underlying key reason why this book was written: Ann knows the struggle with and the effects of burnout. As a pastor's daughter she saw firsthand the struggle leaders and their families have because of this "disease." Years later, as a church leader, she was hospitalized because stress began wreaking havoc on her body. She had burned out.

A look at the structure of the book brings insight to its total focus on burnout. It is interesting that medical terms and concepts are used throughout staying with its theme of "disease." Part 1: How the Burnout Epidemic Is Killing the Greatest Call; Part 2: Am I at Risk? Examining Risk Factors and Symptoms; Part 3: Getting Better; Part 4: A Path to Health and Recovery.

I believe that chapters three, four and five, which make up Part 2 of the book, were probably the strongest for aiding the reader to deal with his or her own stress. In this section, Jackson deals with Internal Risk Factors (Chapter 3), External Risk Factors (Chapter 4) and Symptoms (Chapter 5).

The Journal of Christian Ministry

Some of the external risk factors are: lack of control, pressure to be the best, unclear expectations, conflicts in personality or values. She also has a part of this chapter labeled "The Furnace" based on the Biblical section of the Fiery Furnace in the Book of Daniel, and a case study of an Executive Pastor named John.

Internal risk factors are: personality type (with a chart comparing Type A and Type B characteristics), our history, our health, our relationship with Christ.

The Symptoms (Chapter 5) is a great section to assist on in getting a look at what might be going on in life. There is a checklist to determine what symptoms we might possess.

In each of these parts, there is a section called "Second Opinion" in which key writers and ministers give an opinion to points made by Jackson. In Part 1, she includes opinions by Bill Hybels and Perry Noble. Others included are: Mike Foster, Wayne Cordeiro, Matt Carter, Shawn Wood, Gary Kinnaman and Brandi Wilson (mostly familiar evangelical names). These opinions are done in interview format.

Throughout the book there are "pop-up" quotes from devotional writers of the past, such as Lettie Cowman, F.B. Meyer, Oswald Chambers, Charles Swindoll, etc. There is also evidence of reference to research articles such as to Ellison Research, "Just How Healthy is The Typical Pastor?" These additions are in a shaded section in contrast to other such items.

Toward the end of selected chapters there is something called "Exam Room." This feature contains questions designed for a person to do what they would do what is done in any doctor's room - "strip down and get naked about what is making you

The Journal of Christian Ministry

sick.” These questions are good for personal thought and could be discussed in group settings.

Excellent charts are imbedded throughout, including Burnout versus stress (p. 95) and Self Righteous Service/True Service (p. 126). A great chart (like a typical medical chart) is found on pp. 96-98. The symptom is given along with a place to check if one has the symptom and for how long (duration). It would make an effective handout in class.

While this volume has mostly positives for its purposes (pop-level, colorful layout, current issue) there are some weaknesses. Since stress and burnout are such major issues for ministers today, Jackson’s work may come across as too light in coverage on a subject needing more psychological/medical support. I also found it interesting that only one woman was included in the “Second Opinion” sections. These weaknesses do not prevent this book from being helpful for its intended purpose and audience.

How can this book be used in the D.Min. degree? Courses in Ministerial Identity, Healthy Minister and Leadership, not as a textbook but as resource for use alongside presentation. Directors could find help in dealing with their own personal stress.

“Don’t give up on the church” was stated to Anne by her grandfather hours before he died. These words gave Anne the impetus to remind us not to give up on the church and to not allow its disease (burnout) to become viral.