

scattered towards the end of the book. These weaknesses notwithstanding, the text does have several assets. For example, the case descriptions are interesting, the author's enthusiasm for his work is evident and a basic framework for working with teenagers is presented. Novice child care workers and social workers, who are interested in working with teenagers, will benefit from reading this short book.

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Robert Coles (1988). *Harvard Diary: Reflections on the Sacred and the Secular*. New York, New York: Crossroad.

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Pulitzer Prize-winning author and Harvard professor of psychiatry, Robert Coles, makes a daring statement in his reflections on the sacred and the secular. The history of counselling and psychotherapy, with a few noted exceptions, has been quiet on the spiritual and religious life of individuals. If the spiritual is found in the literature, it is cited, at best, under a special category such as pastoral counselling, or at worst as a reflection of a psychopathology such as the cause of excessive guilt.

In the *Harvard Diary* Coles records the painful journey of an academic who describes his ongoing questions regarding the spiritual and religious dimension of being human. The difficulty Coles had was not that he began his journey as an atheist or an agnostic, but that as a professor of Child Psychiatry at Harvard, well-versed in his field, he failed to see the relevance of the religious and the spiritual as a normal part of everyday life. He had not conceived of spiritual and religious life as being integrated with everyday living. It did not seem "worth comprehending on its own merits, with its own dignity and significance" (p. 141) in the early days of his career. Spiritual and religious life therefore had to be explained and seen as a reflection, an expression, a consequence of some antecedent of a personal event or of a given cultural phenomenon, but never as an event with credence of its own.

This quest for the sacred and the secular was quickened in Coles' study of children. He was more interested in what children "do" than what they "think". Coles observed that children (as well as adults) are capable of brilliant, high level, moral responses to scenarios provided by researchers. However, these same children may respond at significantly lower moral levels to the scenarios that everyday living provides. At the same time, Coles needed to come to terms with a child named Ruby, who was not capable of making clever, high level, verbal responses demonstrating reasoning and ethical analysis. But Ruby, in the face of a mob who tormented her daily on her way to school prayed, "Please, dear god, forgive those people because they don't know what they are doing" (p. 143). The girl managed the deed.

Coles found the psychological investigation of Ruby's behaviour to be arrogant and insensitive to her humble, forgiving position. Such a method would leave out the spiritual dimension of her being. Understandably it is difficult to be scientifically analytical and reductionistic about the notion of

forgiveness. Coles therefore went in search of an approach that did not impose all sorts of sociological and psychological constraints and evaluations on what is there. He consequently claimed a narrative model which became more useful in his work; a model which allows the paradoxes, the polarities, the dynamic tensions of values and truths to exist side by side.

The journey for Coles was painful as well because of what he needed to learn about himself and the intellectual community in which most of his critics reside. He discovered there was an alarming absence of reaction to an entire dimension of his work. Providing he continued to churn out objective, scientific observations such as social conclusions, psychological generalizations, orientations, and analysis, correspondents and essayists were enthusiastically and publicly cheering him on. But when Coles described subjective, spiritual events such as an old Spanish woman's or Southern black child's feeling about God and His Word the response of the intellectual community was either silence or truculence like... "I don't see why you need to get yourself into all that religious talk... a page is enough... not a chapter..." (p. 23).

What matters to the intellectuals, as Coles discovered, were the explanations and motivations. He was scolded by his peers that as a psychiatrist and an educated person with perspective he should know better (p. 23).

Coles concludes that in spite of the social traumas, emotional hurdles and racial inequalities that need to be studied, we must also document what people "believe and how their beliefs prompt them to live their lives." (p. 24) When Coles started doing that rather earnestly he learned something about himself and "his kind."

How arrogant and self centered we risk becoming: interested in our own heady assertions and anxious to be the spokespersons for all those others, who don't write and teach... who, yes, in large numbers... keep calling on Jesus Christ, not the intellectuals, for guidance. (p. 24)

Coles deals with many tough issues in the *Harvard Diary*. He has diary entries on abortion, pornography, homosexuality, teenage pregnancy and existentialism. Even though he has written his book in the form of a diary, Coles relies not only on his own reflections on the sacred and the secular, but also on the Western intellectual tradition. Many chapters are devoted to insights from classical authors such as Tolstoy, William Carlos Williams, Flannery O'Connor, Paul Tillich, Orwell, Walker Percy and others.

I highly recommend the book for those counsellors and helpers who are in search of an approach for working through matters of a spiritual and religious nature. Coles is intrigued by those "people who got all A's and flunked ordinary living" (p. 143), and he is not alone in this intrigue. There is much to learn from Coles as he lays bare his heart and conscience. Even though he claims that he has yet far to travel, it is likely he is much farther along the way than many of his readers, including myself.