BOOK REVIEWS

THE DINAH PROJECT: A HANDBOOK FOR CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE. By Monica A. Coleman. *Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004, 177 pp., $23.00 ISBN 0-8298-1587-2, paperback.*

This book is an important contribution to the body of work that addresses the faith aspects of sexual abuse and violence. Written in plain, easily accessible language, Coleman's objective is to help congregations take concrete action to meet the spiritual needs of survivors of sexual violence and to engage communities in struggling with the theological questions that such a scourge raises. The work is a testimony to Coleman's forward movement after her own devastating experience of sexual violence that occurred in her first year in divinity school at the hands of a fellow seminarian.

The Dinah Project is named after Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, who was raped by Shechem, the prince of the region where they lived. Genesis 34 relates that Shechem's soul was drawn to Dinah and he asked Hamor, his father, to approach Jacob to give Dinah to him in marriage. The narrative reveals the outrage of Dinah's brothers who deceitfully agree to the marriage on the condition that every male among them be circumcised and who then avenge the rape by murdering the males while they are healing. Dinah's voice is absent and her response to the rape and its aftermath is invisible. Coleman calls our attention to the Dinahs in our midst, those who suffer in silence and alone. *The Dinah Project* impresses upon us that sexual violence is not merely an offense against an individual but is a violation of the entire community.

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Therefore, healing from the devastating pain is not just a burden to be borne individually but is a burden to be shared communally.

The first four chapters of the work introduce basic information on the incidence of sexual violence in the United States, the reasons why faith communities should respond to sexual violence and the emotional and spiritual consequences to the victim in the aftermath of sexual violence. Chapters 5-9 give detailed information about how to establish a ministry to victims and all those who are affected. The information includes becoming educated about sexual violence, researching existing services, networking with service providers and other professionals, recruiting people with a variety of skills and gifts as committee members, organizing the tasks of the committee, coordinating worship services, recruiting volunteers, and educating the community. Woven throughout these "how to" chapters are bits of theological reflection on why sexual violence causes a spiritual crisis for survivors and why the faith community should be involved in their journey for healing.

Coleman, a Christian and an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church engages in a more in-depth theological reflection on the rationale for a Dinah ministry in the last four chapters. Although including theological foundations for the ministry is important, the narrow perspective of the theological reflection limits the book's audience to Protestants. Even as a Protestant I have mixed reactions to Coleman's reflections, however I commend her willingness to wrestle with the questions. The theological reflection Chapter 10 addresses survivors' shattered spirits and experiences of post traumatic stress disorder in the wake of sexual violence and the subsequent disconnection with their bodies and sexuality. The author also examines some of the inconsistent messages in the Biblical text about the spirit-body connection, sexuality, male-female roles, and sexual assault that present challenges for a survivor working through the faith aspects of recovering from the assault. Chapter 11 struggles with painful theological questions a survivor might ask such as "Why did God allow this assault to happen to me?" and perspectives on these questions that help survivors reconstruct their view of God, suffering, and evil. Chapter 12 explores the issue of "getting over it" what Coleman views as another form of trying to rush the survivor to forgive the perpetrator. The theology of forgiveness is very complex and the generalization that there is a Christian obligation to forgive weakens the chapter. However, I resonated with Coleman's view of forgiveness as a communal event, not something an individual can do alone. The final chapter is a message of hope for survivors that there is life after sexual violence and that the church can effectively ac-

company survivors on their journey of healing by ending the silence and coming alongside their Dinahs.

The Appendices provide added value to the handbook nature of the work. Appendix A lists web sites, organizations, and books that give the reader a running start on educating oneself about the issue. Appendices B, C, and E save the prospective Dinah project leader time with its vision and mission statements, sample invitation letters, job descriptions, press releases, order of worship, litanies, program dramatizations, and forms used when including a Group Counseling component. The Popular Ineffective Responses and Effective Responses included in Appendix D are helpful reminders of the importance of our words. Appendix F is a master checklist.

For a church struggling with the issue of its relevance to the broader community, *The Dinah Project* presents one answer to the question of what it means to be a church. It also offers a challenge and growth opportunity for a congregation. This practical book is a valuable resource for a church that has a heartfelt desire to being a transformative presence in the community.

Kimberly G.W. Day-Lewis

SINS OF OMISSION: THE JEWISH COMMUNITY'S REACTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. By Carol Goodman Kaufman. *Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003, 227 pp., $26.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-8133- 4088-8.*

The title of Carol Goodman Kaufman's book, *Sins of Omission*, is based on the Yom Kippur liturgy during which Jews ask forgiveness for the sin of not acting, when to have taken action would have furthered justice and righteousness. Kaufman's central goal is to analyze the Jewish community's response, or stated more accurately for Kaufman's lens–the lack of a response–to domestic abuse and to make recommendations for Jewish organizations to create the changes needed. Unfortunately, the book's title might apply both to the Jewish community's response to domestic violence (at least historically) and to Kaufman's approach to researching her topic. The result is a publication that falls short of its potential

to help drive forward the Jewish community's work. Yet, like the Jewish community's response to abuse, there are positive aspects to this publication.

Sins of Omission is based on phone and in-person interviews as well as library and internet archival research conducted by Dr. Kaufman, an industrial and organizational psychologist, who is a Visiting Scholar at the Brudnick Center for the Study of Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University in Boston. Appendix A details her research protocol. She conducted interviews with 22 female survivors of abusive marriages (note references to "spousal," not "partner" abuse), 33 pulpit rabbis (including a range from Hasidic to non-affiliated congregations), 7 Jewish communal professionals, 47 lay leaders and volunteers and 28 non-Jewish professionals whose work includes addressing domestic violence, staff of a range of national Jewish organizations, including rabbinic and synagogue associations, and she surveyed all Jewish Family and Children's Services agencies around the country. The author notes that sample sizes are too small for quantitative analyses but adequate for the qualitative analysis that shaped the book. Her research design purposely limited interviews to survivors and clergy who reside in Massachusetts.

In the Introduction the author provides a good overview to the concept of the Jewish "community," as a prelude to further exploration in Chapter 5. This is a notion taken for granted by many Jews but often missed by non-Jewish audiences and central to understanding a Jewish response on any subject. In the first of six chapters Kaufman does an excellent job of introducing the reader to the experiences of victims and survivors of spousal abuse with Jewish organizations, synagogues and clergy, through their compelling stories. Chapter 2 provides a good understanding of the dynamics of abuse in the Jewish community and the meaning of *shalom bayit*, peace in the home, as a part of Jewish tradition that has often been misused by rabbis and others to encourage women to stay in abusive relationships. A highlight of the chapter is the two pages devoted to assessing the state of the Jewish community's knowledge about the incidence of domestic abuse, correctly pointing out that there is no hard statistical data for this specific population. This is a welcome relief to the many references by other authors about what is known when, in fact, that information is primarily anecdotal. Chapter 3 discusses what Jewish law says about domestic abuse, and how various rabbis and others have interpreted this, both historically and in a modern context.

Basically, the first three chapters provide context to the following three which are the heart of the book. While Kaufman states in her Introduction that *Sins of Omission* is meant to present a different examination of

the subject than what has previously been published, in fact these first 3 chapters focus on precisely what the author says the book is *not* about–understanding abuse in the context of Jewish community, tradition and *halachah* (Jewish law), and repeats much of what is found elsewhere. Nonetheless, a lot of excellent information is included and readers will gain insight into some of the salient issues relating to how the Jewish community has responded organizationally to spousal abuse.

In Chapter 4, "Rabbis and Willful Neglect" the author begins to address directly the topic of her book with a report on the interviews she conducted with 33 rabbis, primarily Reform and Conservative, and including one cantor whose responses are counted with rabbinical ones. Kaufman's survey pool represents about half the rabbis in the state of Massachusetts, where she focuses her research. The information gleaned is worth reading, if only to confirm what those who work in the field already know–rabbis receive little training on domestic abuse and they lack confidence in addressing it in their congregations. However, a more in-depth analysis about what rabbis had to say and some comparative data from earlier years would have been useful.

For example, Kaufman asked rabbis: "Do you feel prepared to deal with spousal abuse in your own congregation?" While less than 1/3 responded "yes" and almost 1/2 responded "no" or "absolutely not," some provided interesting details about the efforts they have made through training by local domestic violence agencies and in one case a district attorney's office, to become better prepared. And, while 19 out of 33 rabbis had never addressed the subject of spousal abuse in a sermon, 14 had! This transformation–rabbis seeking training and rabbis speaking about the issue at all–is remarkable and deserves further study, given the objective of the book. Instead, the chapter was shaded by a context of Jewish community denial, which, while not yet entirely out-of-date, is currently undergoing change and should have been the focus of the publication. One wonders whether Kaufman could have felt compelled by the title of the book to focus on what has not happened rather than to explore what the Jewish community has done.

While Chapter 4 was disappointing but still valuable, Chapter 5, "Communal Leaders' Response to Abuse," was painful to read and skewed with inaccurate information and incomplete research. Again, a bright point is Kaufman's excellent and important description of the Jewish "community." For anyone not connected to Jewish life, the 7-8 pages devoted to this topic can be a useful read. That is, until the discussion of The Leadership Conference of National Jewish Women's Organizations (LCNJWO), which the author uses to create a thread around

which a great deal of her subsequent discussion is woven. Kaufman describes the LCNJWO as: ". . . an organization formed for the express purpose of educating its members about a variety of "women's" issues. The first item on the Conference's agenda was domestic abuse. . . ." Throughout Chapter 5, Kaufman implies that the LCNJWO acted as a coordinating body for the Jewish community's response to the issue, and seems to suggest that participation in the "Conference" can be used as a measuring stick for a particular Jewish institution's concern for the issue. These implications are erroneous and distort her findings. The LCNJWO dated back to at least 1984, not the mid-90s as indicated by Kaufman. The purpose was coalition building among its members and lobbying for change on issues of common concern–women's issues in general, and in the 1980s, more specifically, Soviet Jewry. Membership was open to and comprised all 12 of the national Jewish women's organizations. The main purpose of the coalition remained the same in the 1990s. However, with no single issue dominating the agenda, as had Soviet Jewry in earlier years, and with most member organizations facing internal problems relating to shrinking membership, commitment to the "conference" waned. In 1996 most, if not all, constituent members, had done some work to address domestic violence. The LCNJWO decided to sponsor a public awareness campaign on domestic violence in the Jewish community, hoping that in addition to affecting change, the campaign would revive the organization as a powerful lobbying group. However, while a successful campaign was launched through widespread distribution of brochures and posters in 1996/97, the coalition has not met since May 2000. Kaufman's implied suggestion that the demise of the organization had anything to do with the continued shared commitment to ending violence against women by members is simply wrong–rather it related to the inability of any one member group to take on leadership for the coalition.

Equally bothersome to the inadequate research, is the bias throughout the book, but particularly evident in Chapter 5, to identify the Jewish community's "sins of omission" but not its positive fulfillment of commandments to "do justice." The publication is promoted as an "investigation of the Jewish community's response"–yet as mentioned above, the title seems to dictate the research lens. As one of the more clear examples of this bias, the author states (page 148): "Only 145 of the 156 federated Jewish communities in the United States have a JFS. . .!" It is incredulous that a researcher could use the word "only" to describe a response that is equal to a total of 93% of a possible 100% response! And, while Kaufman accurately reports that Jewish communities vary widely

in their response to domestic violence, there is no concrete and comparative data to document such a statement. Kaufman reports that "a few" communities have services. It might have been interesting to let the reader know that, while in 1990 there were 1 or 2 programs to address the specific needs of Jewish victims in the U.S., in 2002 there were approximately 60 such programs. Jumping ahead to Appendix B, "A List for Jewish Resources on Domestic Violence," one finds further evidence of the incomplete research that went into assessing the Jewish community's response to domestic violence. Here Kaufman reports that resources lists she found were "short" and "dated" and that Jewish Women International (JWI) published fewer resources in their new (2002) resource guide volumes than their much earlier guide for rabbis. How could she have missed the several references in JWI's guides to the extensive resource list, noted as too long to be included in its entirety in the resource guides (52 pages), available for a nominal fee separately as the *Resource Directory: Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community–Local, National, and International Organizations and Programs.* This list, constantly updated, is also available on Jewish Women International's website.

Finally, Chapter 6, Conclusions and Recommendations, provides the expected mix of inaccurate and excellent information. The problem is that the uninformed reader would not know the difference.

In conclusion, so little is published about what happens in the Jewish community that every book written should be read by those wanting to understand and move forward the Jewish community's response to domestic abuse. The inaccuracies in this publication, while significant, will not prevent the reader from deepening an appreciation for the painful experiences of Jewish survivors of abuse. The reader will also gain insight into the need for Jewish and secular organizations to continue to increase and improve their responses. The question is whether the glass is half empty or half full and whether the bandwagon of progress can be motivated more by a focus on our "sins" or on the positive contributions to change that deserve some documentation. Clearly, the author of *Sins of Omission* chooses the former.

Diane Gardsbane