

Sex In the Forbidden Zone

By Barrington H. Brennen, June 4, 2003

Question: Dear Sir: Last night I confirmed my suspicion that our pastor is having an affair with the choir director in my church. She is a single woman with three young children for two different men. He spends long hours with his "sweetheart" in the Pastor's Study after church service on Sundays. I saw them holding hands and kissing last week while I was on the beach. It was not a friendly, pastoral kiss. How can a spiritual leader, or any decent man do such a thing? How terrible!. What can we do about this? Why do men do such terrible things?

Answer: How terrible indeed! Without a doubt I know that most of the readers of this column know of, or have heard of rumors of pastors, politicians, medical doctors, chief executive officers of large corporations, or other influential persons who have been involved in sexual impropriety, or in the sexual exploitation of women. Thus the title of my article today--"Sex in the Forbidden Zone" (Published 1997). I actually borrowed this title from a book with the same title, written by psychiatrist Dr. Peter Rutter, where he writes about men in power who have illicit sexual relationships with women and why they do it. Although women and men are guilty of this debasing behavior, this article will focus mostly on men firstly, because research indicates that "96 percent of sexual exploitation by professionals occurs between men in power and women under their care." Secondly, because "the male-female power imbalance is reflective of the pattern that exists in the culture at large." (Rutter, 1997).

THE PAINFUL TRUTH

Why do men in power (government, church, or corporation) seduce their female clients, parishioners, proteges? Or should I also ask why are women attracted to men in power positions. As Dr. Rutter questions in his book, "What motivates men to give up their professional oaths and protective roles to make the fantasy of forbidden sex a reality? And why do women, who may have no sexual interest in these men, often say yes--compromising themselves and their other intimate relationships?"

The stories are many, unbelievable, and sad. To many male leaders in our country have chosen not to be satisfied with their marital partners and have for years led a double life of illicit sexual encounters. Most of the times others know about the illicit behavior and are afraid to confront the issue, or they more than often turn their heads, feelings that it's none of their business.

The sad truth is that the stories about our spiritual leaders' promiscuity is unforgiving and unbelievable. How could they do this we all are asking? The regrettable truth is that these men stay in their spiritual or political power positions for a very long time stagnating their own spiritual growth, but through their charismatic skills and wistful charm, they are successful in pulling the wool over the eyes of "prey" and naive parishioners.

THE RUMORS

Here are samples of some of the disturbing rumors we hear everyday: "The pastor is a lover boy." "The pastor has men as sweethearts." "Our pastor has more children with other women than with his wife, and they still have him preach from the pulpit." "Our pastor cannot keep his hands off women." "Our community leader's house is a breeding ground for promiscuity." "Our political leader gets favors by having sex with whom ever he wants."

It is embarrassing and disturbing to hear these rumors and then to find out that they are actually factual. Even more painful, the church, community, or business does nothing about it. We often act as if this behavior of our pastors/community leader proves their virility, but does not disprove their spirituality. We directly or indirectly encourage them by covering up for them or assisting them in their escapades.

WHY DO MEN DO IT?

Why do spiritual leaders and other professional males do this? We will explore this in Part Two next week. However, it is evident, as Dr. Rutter states that "men's cultural training, often reinforced by family messages when they are growing up, encourages them to challenge women's intimate boundaries and discourage them from developing a more empathic response to the feminine, despite the fact that they have so much more to offer women than predatory sexual opportunism." Return next week for Part Two. This article is also available on www.soencouragement.org