

THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Elaine A. Heath

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is the number one health threat faced by women in the United States today. It accounts for more deaths than automobile accidents, muggings and rapes combined.¹ During America's involvement in the Vietnam War, the number of women murdered by their intimate partners was equal to the number of U.S. military personnel killed in battle.² In 1981 researchers Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz estimated that at least one third of all wives in the United States are beaten during the course of their marriage.³ By 1987 researchers upped the figure to a "conservative estimate" of half of all marriages experiencing episodes of violence at some time.⁴ At least ninety-five percent of domestic violence is male against female and it is rare for violence in a marriage to be an isolated episode. Violence is usually a pattern in the relationship.

Most telling of all for the church, in traditional, patriarchal marriages where the husband is "head" and the wife "submits" there is a vastly greater chance that the wife will be battered.⁵ While domestic violence is a sin⁶ that knows no racial, economic or social barriers, the highest rates of domestic violence are found in patriarchal relationships. Church-sanctioned patriarchy is one of the primary reasons that women remain in violent relationships.⁷

The essay that follows is about the phenomenon of domestic violence among professing Christians. Domestic violence is an evil which must be named and owned by Christians individually and collectively. The church cannot afford to continue to ignore domestic violence and to sanction ideologies that feed domestic violence. To do so is to tell the world that the good news of the Gospel is bad news for women, a message that is patently false. How can the church be a prophetic voice against injustice in the world if it tolerates and even perpetuates violence against its own daughters? The words of God through the prophet Amos confront the church today:

I hate all your show and pretense—the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with

your hymns of praise! They are only noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a river of righteous living that will never run dry (Amos 5:21-24, NLT).

With that let us turn to a story about domestic violence from God's word that was written for God's people about God's people. This story will serve as our paradigm for the problem of domestic violence amidst the people of God.

THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE: A BIBLICAL NARRATIVE OF VIOLENCE

We meet her in Judges 19:1-30. She has no name and does not speak. We only know her as the Levite's concubine. She calls the Levite "husband" but to him she is a slave. She lives and dies in the nightmare of domestic violence. Her suffering is not redemptive. The ancient editorial decision to put her story at the end of Judges is deliberate. Her torture, rape, murder and mutilation with its aftermath of civil war bring to a bloody climax the unifying theme of the book, summed up in the final verse: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25 NLT). The stark and multiplied evil found in her story testifies to the depths of depravity that are possible when God's people break the covenant. Covenant-breaking leads to a perversion of conscience. Any evil is possible when people do "what is right in their own eyes."

Exegetes traditionally read the concubine's story with only a passing interest in the concubine.⁸ She has a minor role as a backdrop to the men in the story. The typical interpretation focuses upon the men: the wants and needs of the men, the "unheard of crime" of male homosexuality and sadism in Gibeah, the violation of oriental hospitality rules affecting the men, the tragic war between Israelite men, and the need for Benjaminite men to find wives.

The problem with this hermeneutic, as Phyllis Trible so eloquently demonstrates, is that it misses the terrifying pathos of the story, the *concubine's* story, which resonates with the lived experience of far too many women.⁹ There is more to this story's meaning than the concerns of the men or the proposed original *Sitz im Leben*. The muffled cries of the concubine must be heard. The church must "journey alongside the concubine: to be her companion in a literary and hermeneutical enterprise."¹⁰ For the concubine has much to say to the church.

The Reverend Elaine A. Heath is an ordained pastor and a Ph.D. candidate in Systematic Theology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. She is also a long-time member of CBE.

When read with Ricoeur's "second naiveté"¹¹ the concubine is Everywoman who lives with abuse. She suffers physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, economic and spiritual violence. She is archetypal for Christian women in particular who attempt to leave abusive relationships only to find themselves betrayed, hunted down, handed over and silenced by husband, church, clergy, family of origin and the community. The very institutions that should protect a woman's life become co-conspirators in her destruction.

Notice the relationships in the concubine's life. Her husband is a Levite, a man from, of all things, the priestly tribe. She is betrayed into his hands by her father, to whom she has fled for refuge from her husband.¹² As the Levite returns home after reclaiming his runaway concubine, they must spend the night in Gibeah. The old man there who offers sanctuary to the Levite and concubine is a model of loyalty to the sacrosanct institution of hospitality. But his beneficence is for men, not women. When village men come at night demanding to have sex with the Levite,¹³ the old man quickly offers them a substitute: his own virgin daughter and the concubine, to "ravish them and do to them the good in your eyes" (19:24 RSV). The institution of hospitality is inviolable. All the males must be attended to. The evil men cannot simply be refused. They too must be shown "hospitality." The women have no voice, neither the concubine nor the old man's virgin daughter, for they exist to satisfy the wishes of the men. Their lives are worth less than the institution.

The Levite suddenly pushes the concubine out into the dark with the violent men, who torture and rape her until dawn. She falls unconscious at the old man's door, her hands piteously holding onto the threshold of the door. Her husband, upon finding her in the morning, orders her to get up. There is no feeling for her, no thought for her. When the concubine is murdered¹⁴ and dismembered by her husband afterward there are no negative consequences for him. He successfully shifts the blame to the men of Gibeah, civil war ensues and 600 more women are kidnapped and violated, their families murdered, their lives given over to satisfy the needs of the men. The cycle of violence continues.

Why did the author of Judges end the book in this way? Is the concubine simply a foil for the important (male) actors in the story or is her story a primary story? I propose that the latter is true.

The concubine's suffering, the circumstances surrounding her death and subsequent carnage are the final, incontrovertible proof of the author's point. What is the author's point? Covenant-breakers are capable of any evil. For covenant-breakers, conscience progressively deforms into "everyone doing what is right in his own eyes." Conscience is no longer the internalization of the Torah. It is now the internalization of Canaanite depravity. The Levite, the concubine's father, the old man and the men of Gibeah all "do what is good in their eyes" to the concubine. They follow their evil consciences. The other men of Israel in declaring

war on the Benjaminites follow their consciences. The rape and plunder of the 600 women and the destruction of their homes and families is the final act of conscience, concluding with the words: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The author's terse, matter-of-fact report of the events underscores the grim reality of it all.

A primary theme of the Book of Judges is that the people of God progressively lost their conscience.¹⁵ Inevitably the innocent suffered.¹⁶ The violence committed against the concubine *ought* to be unthinkable among God's people. Institutions *ought not* to be more precious than human life. But God's people have gone astray. They have devolved into Sodom and Gomorrah but things are worse, for there are no angels to intervene. Every person in this story is an Israelite, is numbered among "the people of God." This story is a picture of what ought never exist among the people of God, of what it "looks like" when God's people drift from God's law and allow their consciences to be determined by idolatrous values, by whatever is "right in their own eyes." This story is a call for reformation.

A CALL FOR REFORMATION

Read from a Christian, typological perspective, the story of the Levite's concubine is a negative paradigm for the church about conscience gone bad, about the grim reality of something that "ought never be" among the people of God. It is a call for reformation of Christian conscience. The concubine is the Christian woman who suffers violence at her husband's hands. She calls him "husband" but the relationship is one of master and slave. The Levite is her husband, perhaps her "Christian" husband.¹⁷ The father is the woman's Christian family of origin, while the old man who presides over the inviolable institution of hospitality, offering sojourners a refuge from evil, is a symbol of clergy who preside over the sacrosanct institution of marriage. Who are the men of Gibeah? They are we whom God has led out of the Egypt of sin into the Promised Land of redemption, only to have given ourselves over to a new kind of bondage. We have bought into the oppressive systems of the "powers and principalities"¹⁸ embraced by the idolatrous world.¹⁹ The men of Gibeah are all of us in the church who ought to model redemption from the curse²⁰ of patriarchy but who instead perpetuate the curse as the very will of God. For Gibeah, the morality of patriarchy "seems right in our own eyes." We can scarcely imagine anything else.

We Christians who are appalled at Gibeah make the same mistake the rest of Israel made in declaring war on Benjamin, if we simply take up arms against patriarchy and march in to do a matricentric²¹ version of pillage, plunder and rape. Gendered hierarchy is not the answer. Nor is violence.

The Word of God calls the Church instead to a reformation of conscience, to a re-forming of conscience concerning relationships between women and men that are

rooted in redemption instead of the curse, patterned after the relationship within the Trinity and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This “new” (actually ancient) paradigm for men and women is revealed at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18) when the Spirit is given to men and women alike. It is spoken of by the Apostle Paul who writes: “For in Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). It exists in its original form in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve, prior to the entrance of sin. The reformation of Christian conscience concerning women and men requires that we begin by naming the ways in which women and men in the church work together to perpetuate the old way of the curse.

PATRIARCHY, THEOLOGY, HERMENEUTICS AND CONSCIENCE

How do the woman’s abusive husband, family of origin, clergy and church collaborate in the battered woman’s destruction? How responsible is the battered woman for her suffering? Is the abuse her fault? Does she “bring it on” somehow, or if she stays with the batterer does it mean she wants to be abused? Who is responsible for the sin? To answer these questions we must look at the relationships between patriarchy, theology, biblical hermeneutics and conscience.

At its core, violence against women is the logical conclusion of patriarchy.²² Patriarchy is an ideology, a system of beliefs, values and behaviors that systematically privileges men at the expense of women. It assumes that men are inherently superior to women. As Hammond notes, in patriarchal societies such as our own, “it is instructive to view patriarchy first and foremost as a type of conscience.”²³ While it is true that the degree of patriarchal conditioning varies from one individual, family, congregation or denomination to the next, the presence of patriarchy in American society is pervasive. When reinforced with religious teachings and practices that promote patriarchy as God’s created, original order, it becomes a nearly invincible power in conscience formation. Conscience, moreover, as moral theologian Anne E. Patrick argues, is not simply a private, internal, individualistic judge. From both biblical and contemporary perspectives conscience is a profoundly social phenomenon.²⁴ This reality is clearly seen in the role of the “patriarchal Christian conscience” in the interlocking network of relationships that contribute to the battered woman’s destruction. Such a conscience deeply influences the victim, her husband, family, congregation and clergy in their responses to her plight.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the origins, history, breadth and depth of patriarchy in the church, with patriarchal interpretations of the Bible, patriarchal interpretations of ecclesiology, and so forth.²⁵ For our purposes let us consider just a few of the ways in which the church uses patriarchal theology and hermeneutics against

the victim of domestic violence, thereby participating in the sin against her.²⁶

When a battered woman goes to a pastor for help with the abuse, there are five common responses.²⁷ In the first four responses the pastor sides with the abuser. First, women are not believed and so are sent away without help or support. The refusal to believe may be a passive, non-committal stance by the pastor.²⁸ The woman is often asked what *she* did to bring about the abuse.²⁹ (This response suggests, of course, that battering is acceptable, that a woman deserves it.) The next response is similar, but worse. The woman’s story is denied by the pastor. She is accused of exaggerating or making up the story, especially if her husband is an active member of the church.³⁰ The third response is abandonment—the choice of “the priest and Levite passing by on the other side of the road.”³¹ The pastor believes the story but simply refuses to get involved because it is a messy and potentially dangerous situation. The pastor may shame the woman for putting up with the abuse, or ask her why she doesn’t “just leave.” This response, too, puts all the responsibility on the woman. Occasionally a woman goes to a pastor who does the right thing. He or she gives complete support, believes her story, neither shames nor blames her nor requires her to make decisions too soon, helps her get to a safe place, and helps her find resources she needs in order to heal. This response, unfortunately, is the rare exception. Most of the time the clergy are the old man of Gibeah. Sanctuary is for men, not women. Husbands must be allowed to “do what is good in their eyes.”

When James and Phyllis Alsdurf interviewed 80 abused Christian women from conservative Protestant traditions, the women said almost without exception that their pastors responded to their disclosure of abuse by focusing on the woman’s need to change in order to keep the relationship together. The pastors did not speak of the man’s need to change or the woman’s need to protect her life and her children being greater than the need to protect the marriage. The appearance of maintaining the marriage was the most important thing, and that depended entirely upon the woman. Clergy made it clear that “the woman is not welcome in the church family unless she stays with her abusive husband and takes the burden of responsibility for change upon herself.”³² In conservative Protestant circles in particular, it is not uncommon for male pastors to tell battering victims to “go back and submit more, pray harder and regard the abuse as an opportunity to suffer for Jesus’ sake.”³³

Writing of such clergy’s culpability in perpetuating domestic violence in the African American church, Frances E. Wood refers to the “yoke of violence” that is part of woman’s “membership fee” in the church. “This yoke consists of silencing, ignoring, degrading, and dismissing women’s experience, especially those experiences that reveal the nature and extent of oppression perpetrated against them within the [faith] community.”³⁴ The real taboo, Wood insists, is not the violence, but talking about the violence.

The concubine must not be given a voice to tell her story. If her story does leak out, she is only to be interpreted as a foil to the men in her story. It is the abuser's needs that are most important, the maintenance of the institution at women's expense, the unchallenged toleration of Gibeah's values. The old man will even sacrifice his daughter. This is the sin of the clergy.

The voice forming the skewed clergy conscience, thereby the actions of the "old man of Gibeah" is that of patriarchal hermeneutics, that is, Bible scholars and theologians who train the clergy to interpret scripture through the lens of patriarchy. Such interpretations of biblical texts regarding marriage and divorce are key both in women's staying in abusive marriages and in the opposition women receive from clergy, family of origin and congregation, if they attempt to leave an abusive relationship. These interpretations are almost without exception done by interpreting the biblical text outside of its historic, literary and theological contexts, but this is not readily apparent to the average lay Christian.

Citing Jesus' words in Matthew 5:31-32,³⁵ the Protestant church has traditionally argued that divorce is only permissible in cases of adultery, if even then.³⁶ This continues to be the position of many evangelical churches.³⁷ Sexual infidelity is seen as the *only* reason a woman can legitimately seek a divorce.³⁸ If her life is in danger she may be permitted to separate from her abusive husband, but she is not permitted to divorce him unless he commits adultery.³⁹ If she does go so far as to divorce him over the abuse, then she becomes an "adulteress" and cannot remarry later on, since to do so would be to cause her new husband to "commit adultery."⁴⁰ Instead she is expected to live the rest of her life single and celibate, with the shame of being a perpetual "adulteress." To be an adulteress is to face eternal judgment, she is told from Hebrews 13:4. God's mercy is not available to her for she is choosing to live in perpetual "adultery." It is not explained to the woman how she can be "an adulteress" without being sexually involved with someone else. She is typologically labeled an adulteress for leaving her abusive husband, which "breaks the covenant." He is not typologically labeled an adulterer even though he is the one who actually broke the covenant with his violence.

With this same hermeneutic the abused woman who wishes to leave the relationship is quoted Paul's words forbidding the Christian in an "unequally yoked" marriage to initiate divorce (1 Cor 7:10-16), followed by Peter's instructions to wives to submit to non-Christian husbands (1 Pet 3:1-2). These admonitions are used to keep her with her violent husband in order "that he may be won over without a word by his wife's conduct, when he sees the purity and reverence"⁴¹ of the submissive woman's life. The concubine is told, in other words, that her suffering is

redemptive for the Levite. He is worth whatever pain she must endure so that he can be "saved."

Finally the woman is reminded of the first half of Malachi 2:16: "For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel."⁴² The victim of abuse is left feeling that God is clearly on the side of her abuser because to God the marriage contract is more valuable than the woman's life. (If there are children, it is more important that they have a father living in the house than that he be a safe father.) The woman is made to feel responsible for keeping the marriage covenant intact even though her husband is the one who breaks the covenant with his violence (Mal 2:16b).

For the battered woman, marriage is not a partnership between equals based on friendship and mutual respect. Marriage is a hierarchical relationship in which she calls the man "husband" but he treats her as a concubine, a sexual slave with few boundaries or rights of her own. For the Christian woman whose conscience has been formed by this hermeneutic, and whose family of origin, congregation and pastor accept and perpetuate this hermeneutic, the stakes are very high indeed for leaving an abusive marriage. To leave is to violate her (patriarchal) Christian conscience. It is to incur the rejection of every Christian support system the woman has. She does not hear an alternate voice coming from God's people, offering a way of redemption from bondage. Like the concubine, she sees no angels coming to her defense. If she does flee to her patriarchal family of origin for help, they, like the concubine's father, send her back for further abuse. This is the sin of her family. It is for this reason that many Christian women who finally leave abusive husbands also leave the church.

There are other reasons, of course, that Christian women along with women in general remain in battering relationships. Fear is a major motivator. The thought of her husband's rage if she should try to leave is enough to keep her stuck. Studies have shown that even though one-third of all police calls are concerned with domestic violence, police are reluctant to get involved.⁴³ Women learn that the police will not protect them. A call to the police will cause the husband's violence to escalate, which is even more terrifying. Indeed, the woman's fear is not unfounded. Many of the murdered women cited by the Surgeon General's statistics were women in the act of leaving abusive partners.

The fear involved in battering systematically disempowers a woman by destroying her self-esteem. Like POWs who have succumbed to their captors' brainwashing, she becomes unable to make decisions, trust her perceptions or to consider her real options. She becomes convinced that her thralldom is the only option. Most of the time the woman is economically

The repentant church is one in which men and women are seen as equal partners in church, home and society, and whose gifts are developed and welcomed in the church at every level of leadership. Equality and mutual submission are the norm.

disempowered as well, so that the thought of survival on her own (especially if she has children) seems impossible.

Perhaps the strongest force that keeps her in bondage is that the battered woman is persuaded during the “honeymoon” phase of the abuse cycle,⁴⁴ that the sweet, contrite, remorseful husband who swears never to hurt her again, is her “real” husband. He was simply overcome by anger which, she tells herself, she brought on with her failure to please him or failure to anticipate his needs. She convinces herself that she can try harder and will please him enough that he will continue to be his true, loving self and he won’t have to hurt her again. Moved with the desire to more diligently attend to her husband’s wishes, she takes complete responsibility for the violence and determines to be more submissive.

As a pastor I have counseled with several battered women who rationalized their husbands’ abuse by psychologizing, saying their husbands had a terrible childhood, were never loved adequately, were themselves abused, etc. These women’s families of origin encouraged the psychologization, arguing that if the wives would simply love their abusive husbands unconditionally, it would heal the men’s pain and the abuse would stop. It is one of the bitter ironies of such situations that the women’s parents are filled with compassion for their son-in-laws, but oblivious to the agony of their daughters. They are willing to sacrifice their own daughters at the altar of the son-in-law’s pain. Usually the families do this during the honeymoon phase, swayed by the batterer’s “remorse.”

In the concubine’s story we first meet the Levite in the honeymoon phase of the cycle, where he sways the woman and her father: “Then her husband arose and went after her to *speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back*, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father’s house, and when the girl’s father saw him, he was glad to meet him (Jdg 19:3, NASB).” (Italics are mine. The literal Hebrew is “to speak to her heart.”) Once he arrives at the concubine’s father’s house and gains entrance with entreating words, the sweetness is over. The terrifying tension begins to mount. The cycle repeats itself.

As we have seen, domestic violence is the logical outcome of patriarchy. It is perpetuated in the church when clergy, the victim, her husband, family of origin and faith community internalize patriarchal hermeneutics and theology. It is reinforced by the world outside the church which also perpetuates the systemic privilege of men at the expense of women. The solution within the church is based upon a reformation of conscience—the formation of a new heart and a new mind concerning the “place” of women and men in the world.

A NEW HEART, A NEW MIND, A NEW LIFE

Now that we have seen some of the ways patriarchal theology of the wife, husband, family of origin, clergy and

church are implicated in the ongoing cycle of domestic violence, let us consider what kinds of consciousness-raising are necessary for each of these to form a truly Christian conscience concerning domestic violence. For it is the formation of conscience that will lead to a conversion—a radical reversal from the individual and systemic beliefs, values and actions that perpetuate domestic violence. Because the remainder of this discussion is concerned with conscience formation we will focus less on crisis intervention protocol, and more on the change of heart process that will bring a radical reduction to the epidemic of domestic violence in the church.⁴⁵

In order to turn from death to life, the battered woman must be helped to take responsibility for her part in ending the abuse. While this is much more likely to happen in the context of a supportive faith community with the help of family and friends, she must ultimately choose to do whatever is necessary to reclaim her life.

The battered Christian woman’s commitment to holy obedience can actually be a powerful tool to help free her from bondage. What she needs to learn is that God’s judgment is against the abuse and that God’s will is for her to be free of abuse. God’s will is for her to take responsibility for herself (and her children) in order to love herself as she would love and care for any other person. Many feminists today such as Judith Plaskow argue that the failure to take responsibility for herself is the besetting sin of women.⁴⁶ Clergy, biblical hermeneutists, theologians and family members can do much to help a woman see the holiness of this process. A Christian woman must be helped to see that by choosing to say “no” to abuse she chooses to say “no” to sin. Her husband’s sin against her must not be enabled.⁴⁷ In choosing to save her life (and her children’s lives) she is honoring God and actually saving her family:

The intent of family, or marriage, covenants is to provide a place where justice, mercy and love are lived out in keeping with God’s covenantal ways. But when the family environment deviates from this intention due to the presence of abuse or violence, then the saving grace is to release the victim from the obligation. In families afflicted by domestic abuse, the only way to save the family is to allow the victim the opportunity to rededicate herself to life abundant in an environment free of abuse... Saving the family means ending the violence that is destroying it.⁴⁸

From a theological perspective, women in the church need to hear from the pulpit and read in Christian education materials the truth that their bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 3:16-17). To care for themselves and to protect their personhood is one of the signs of holiness. When women begin to see themselves in this light, as persons made in the image of God, it is, in Carol Schlueter’s words, “the first light of dawn, a resurrection.”⁴⁹ This is the fundamental paradigm shift that

helps a woman use her commitment to holy obedience, to courageously get out of the abusive situation.

It is no small challenge for pastors and other care-givers to help an abuse victim see herself in this way, because her sense of selfhood is profoundly diminished. Jeanine Sparks, a therapist who specializes in violence intervention and recovery, asks survivors to think about what they would say to a little girl who came to them and said she was being battered. She asks them to imagine how they would care for this little girl and protect her. By locating their need in a hypothetical child, women are usually able to come up with healing strategies for the “child.” This exercise builds a bridge toward locating the need and worth within themselves and toward taking responsibility for themselves.⁵⁰ Whether it is through therapy, conversation with a friend, a Sunday school class or sermon, the woman needs to hear that God is on her side and wants to help her say “no” to abuse.

Is there hope for batterers to heal? Yes, but their healing requires “tough love” and cannot be used to force the woman back into the relationship in the future.⁵¹ The choice to heal is not a genuine choice if it is simply another way to gain control over the woman. For men who batter, “the most loving response [by the church] may be the development of systems of accountability and consequences that stop their destructive behaviors.”⁵² The church must avoid the common temptations to avoid or cover the problem by offering the perpetrator “cheap grace” and sympathy, by blaming the victim, or protecting the abuser from consequences.⁵³ Indeed, the most difficult part of helping a batterer to change is in getting him to take responsibility for himself. His pattern is to externalize his problems and blame them on others, particularly his wife.⁵⁴ During a group session with twenty-five incest offenders they said the worst thing that had happened to them was quick and easy forgiveness from the clergy to whom they “confessed.” By being sent home assured of forgiveness without having to make restitution or work on the issues that led to the abuse, they were relieved of responsibility and continued to abuse their families.⁵⁵ Cheap grace facilitated their ongoing abusive patterns. The same is true for men who batter.

Repentance for the batterer will include owning his sin, getting individual counseling⁵⁶ for the issues involved in his abuse, and submitting himself over a substantial period of time to an accountability structure that involves legal consequences for his actions. Many forms of abuse are illegal. The perpetrator must be made to face the consequences of his actions. While it is the battered woman’s decision as to whether to report her husband to the police, clergy and family members can help by

supporting her in that decision and helping her find out how to make such a report.

Often a batterer will appear to undergo a miraculous conversion after his Christian wife leaves him. He will appear to be a new man—contrite, loving, ready to rebuild a relationship with her. He may attend church regularly, weep, read his Bible and pray publicly. It is critical that clergy and the woman’s family not put pressure on the woman to rejoin her abusive partner and give him another chance at this point, for “it is virtually impossible for true repentance to take place, i.e., a fundamental change of self, without expert help and a structure of accountability.”⁵⁷ Most of the time the sudden “conversion” is part of the honeymoon phase.

In the best case scenario the abuser truly does repent. He turns around and goes in a new, life-giving direction. His wife may even be able in time to forgive him and the relationship be restored. Yet in the best of cases this process is slow, because the repeated violation of her trust is very difficult to heal. Genuine forgiveness on her part begins with a thorough inventory of how she has been abused and how

the abuse has affected her. Nothing can be minimized. Forgiveness must not be hurried. As Marie Fortune says, it is the last step of healing. The first steps are truth-telling about the abuse, deprivatization/breaking the silence, deminimizing and hearing the whole story, and protection of the vulnerable. These must be completed before the last step may be taken.⁵⁸ Forgiveness is preconditioned upon the experience of justice in which the abuse the woman has suffered is fully described and condemned.⁵⁹ The woman experiences justice in the act of naming the offenses, having her pain validated by others (especially clergy and family), seeing the abuser held accountable for what he has done, and in the best cases, seeing the abuser move through the hard work of therapy and other recovery work in order to truly reform

his life. The unfortunate reality is that most abusers do not truly repent or reform. Because that is true, clergy, family, congregation and theologians must be prepared to help the woman to grieve the loss of the marriage, and help her to rebuild her life with the grace of God.

Consciousness-raising in the local church may be approached in several ways. Clear definitions of what constitutes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse are necessary so that clergy and laity can name the violence for what it is. Seminary and continuing education courses, books and videos on domestic violence can go a long way toward equipping clergy with this information. The clergy in turn can help educate congregations through sermons, guest speakers, seminars, classes, and encouraging the congregation to sponsor a battered woman’s shelter.⁶⁰ Without this kind of education it may be difficult for women

Neither patriarchy nor its violence should have a place among the people of God. If we, the people of God, will give ourselves over to redemption from the curse of patriarchy, we will be able to write a new version of the story of the Levite’s concubines who come to us.

to name their abuse or for clergy and family members to spot it and help women become free from abuse.

Consciousness-raising also includes the challenging task of interpreting the biblical texts concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage. Malachi 2:16 can be used to show that violence breaks the marital covenant (thus is a form of typological adultery) as surely as does sexual adultery. Jesus' prohibitions concerning divorce must be taught in their historic, cultural and theological contexts, which were situations in which sexually adulterous men were frivolously divorcing their wives. Virtually all the biblical prohibitions against divorce, when viewed in context, are protective of women in the cultural contexts in which they were written. Teachings on marriage and divorce should be given in the context of the Bible's larger message of the meaning of covenant. That is, *both* partners are responsible to keep the covenant, not just the wife. Finally, these teachings must be given in the context of the Bible's overarching message of grace for broken, needy people. The good news of the Gospel is that of salvation. Divorce, though grievous and to be avoided, is sometimes necessary "because of the hardness of men's hearts." The woman who files for a divorce in order to legally end a covenant which her violent, unrepentant spouse has broken, is not sinning in filing for the divorce. She is not an adulteress and is not bound to remain single and celibate for the rest of her life. The God of justice and of mercy is on her side in saying "no" to death and "yes" to life.

What does it "look like" when congregations repent, when there is a reformation of conscience in the church? It begins with developing congregational awareness of the issues in domestic violence. Congregations need to be challenged to develop attitudes and behaviors that help survivors find safety and healing. Congregations that are truly repentant in this context become prophetic voices in the church at large and in the world, by giving a voice to the statistics and the stories of the "Levite's concubines." On a larger scale and at a deeper level the repentant church renounces gender stereotypes and the ways in which it has perpetuated patriarchy in its polity, ecclesiology, and social structures. The repentant church becomes one in which men and women are seen as equal partners in church, home and society, and whose gifts are developed and welcomed in the church at every level of leadership. Equality and mutual submission (Eph 5:21) are the norm:

In its own internal life, the church must make every effort to embody social conversion through structures and institutions which will serve justice and witness social conversion to all people. Christians must strive to insure just external structures of organization within the church and just internal structures, that is, the authentic use of its myths and symbols in order to enhance justice. It must embody and teach authentic values to which wider society may be blind. The sacramental life of the church must witness the social nature of sin and the social nature of salvation.⁶¹

A NEW STORY

Neither patriarchy nor its violence should have a place among the people of God. If we, the people of God, will give ourselves over to redemption from the curse of patriarchy, we will be able to write a new version of the story of the Levite's concubines who come to us.

In the new story the battered woman who leaves the abusive relationship will be offered refuge and healing love by her family of origin. They will listen to her pain, believe her, help her secure the resources she needs in order to rebuild her life. They will do the hard work of introspection to see if there is any way in which their family system is "setting up" other family members to enter into an abusive relationship. When the Levite shows up at the door they will see and hear with eyes and ears of truth. They will not hand the woman over for further abuse.

The clergy will mediate the presence of Christ to her and will companion her in her healing journey, offering protection from the destructive ideology of the "men of Gibeah." The clergy will discern the evil of giving primacy to institutions when those institutions become agents of death which violate the sanctity of human life. In their teaching and preaching the clergy will empower the woman to "rightly interpret the word of truth"⁶² concerning her value and dignity as a person made in the image of God and concerning the nature of true marriage and true submission. They will help her to regain self-esteem and will provide her with healthy, biblical images of God that will protect her from further abuse. The clergy will help the woman grieve the loss of the marriage if termination of the marriage is necessary. An annulment or something like it will be available for her as a part of her healing process.⁶³

What of the men of Gibeah—the patriarchal church? They will be confronted and called to repentance by the men, women, clergy, couples, congregations and theologians who have chosen to live in the Promised Land as people redeemed from the curse. The men of Gibeah will not be negotiated with or empowered by God's people to continue their oppression of women. They will be held accountable, as will the woman's husband. The Levite will not be allowed to hurt her any more, or blame her for his evil, or treat her like a slave, or pass violence on to the next generation. In the new story perhaps, yes, perhaps even the Levite will convert. This is to be hoped for, but will not have primacy over the woman's life.

When the story ends like this, the world will see and be astonished, for then the words of Amos will be true in a way that radically challenges the brokenness of this world. The prayer of Jesus⁶⁴ will be answered in a way it never has been except in isolated places and times.⁶⁵ The men and women of God will "be one" in mutuality and love, as Jesus is one with the Father. The watching world will know in a way it never has known, that the Gospel according to Jesus is true.

¹These statistics are from the U.S. Surgeon General, cited in Carol J. Schlueter, "Creating a New Reality: No More Domestic Violence," Currents in Mission and Theology 23 (August 1996): 254. Most statistics for domestic violence are concerned strictly with physical battering of the woman. Statistical information is more difficult to obtain regarding other kinds of abuse. Other forms of domestic violence include rape and other acts of sexual abuse, the destruction of pets or property, threats of murder or suicide to punish the woman, and many other kinds of verbal, economic, emotional and spiritual abuse. All of these forms of battering are devastating. The belief that physical battering is the only "real" form of abuse is a myth that contributes to women remaining in dehumanizing relationships.

²Marie M. Fortune and Carol J. Adams, Violence Against Women and Children: A Theological Sourcebook (New York: Continuum, 1995), 502.

³Jim Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, "Wife Abuse and the Christian Home," Daughters of Sarah 13 (July/August 1987): 8.

⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

⁶As we shall see the evil of domestic violence involves both personal sin (moral evil perpetrated by the abuser) and ontic evil (the "natural" evil or *privatio boni* experienced by the one who is abused). It involves "group evil" in the systemic oppression of women within patriarchy.

⁷According to David Currie, chief social worker at Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto, Ontario, "a major contributing factor to women remaining in violent relationships is the endorsement and teaching by our social institutions that women belong in the home, are less competent than men to succeed in the work force, should defer to the dominance of their husbands, and should be the primary emotional support of the family." Schlueter, 259.

⁸Regarding the dismemberment of the concubine (19:29) for example, the Catholic Study Bible (NAB) merely notes it as "a drastic means for arousing the tribes to avenge the unheard of crime of the Benjaminites." The culpability of the Levite is a non-issue. In the accompanying Reading Guide, annotator Pauline Viviano writes: "There are few that cannot be shocked by the events of this story, but we must be careful not to read back into the story our own concerns. The period of the judges was a time when women were considered little more than chattels, especially concubines, and the actions of the Levite would probably not have appeared as negatively as we see them today." Catholic Study Bible, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 140. The NRSV Harper's Study Bible and the NIV Study Bible take a similar approach. Such an approach must be questioned. It is not possible as Christians to read this story *apart from* "our own concerns," nor should we try. As Barth would argue, the point of reading the Bible as Christians is to bring all that we are to that reading in order to submit ourselves and our concerns to the Word's decision about us. To do less is to miss the point. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word, vol 1.2, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 728-29.

⁹Judges 19:1-21:25. I am indebted to the exceptional exegesis of this text by Phyllis Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1984.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹See Mark I. Wallace, The Second Naivete (Macon, GA: Mercer

University Press, 1995), 51ff, and David Tracy, Plurality and Ambiguity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹²Her purpose for fleeing is unclear. The MT and Syriac texts claim that she "played the harlot," while the LXX and Old Latin say that she "became angry with him." Either reading is permissible by the text. Trible, 66. It is significant that she does not flee with a lover, which one would expect if she were adulterous. She returns to her childhood home. Her flight must have had strong cause, for concubines were little more than slaves kept for sexual pleasure and manual labor. She had no legal right to seek a divorce.

¹³Note the parallel to the angels' visit to Lot and Lot's offer to give his daughters to his violent neighbors (Gen 19). The difference in this story is that no angels appear to spare the concubine (see note 14 below, regarding the absence of angels).

¹⁴According to the LXX the concubine was found dead by her husband. The MT does not say this. It uses nuanced language that suggests she may have been alive when her husband "took the knife" and dismembered her. It is the same language used when Abraham "took the knife" to slay Isaac, only Isaac was spared by an angel. Trible, 80.

¹⁵Recall that early in the book (chapters 4-5) a devout woman, Deborah, serves as judge over Israel. She is highly esteemed, followed, and given honor. The denigration of women grows progressively worse as the book continues, climaxing with the concubine's story.

¹⁶The story of Jephthah's daughter (Jdg 11) serves a similar function to the story of the concubine, regarding skewed values and conscience, and the unconscionable sacrifice of an innocent woman by her trusted father. She dies so that he can "save face" and not have to publicly admit he made a mistake. The community supports him.

¹⁷Perhaps he is even a pastor. This scenario is not uncommon. See Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, eds., Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook (New York: Continuum, 1995): 339-360.

¹⁸Eph. 6:12, Paul's description of demonic, systemic evil. M. Scott Peck provides a lengthy discussion of the nature of systemic or group evil and its relationship to "powers and principalities" in his chapter on the My Lai massacre in People of the Lie (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 218ff. Also see Ted Peters, Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994). Patriarchy is a part of the oppressive "powers and principalities" in this world. Racism is a similar evil, though patriarchy is more pervasive.

¹⁹I use "the world" in the Johannine sense of the fallen world in need of redemption (John 1:10c).

²⁰Notice that in Eden prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were equal partners who shared responsibility for tending and subduing the earth (Gen 1:26-28). Alienation between men and women as expressed in the social system of patriarchy, *is a consequence of sin* (Gen 3:16). Patriarchy *is part of the curse* and is therefore something from which Christ has redeemed us. The redeemed relationship between men and women is to be one of mutual submission and partnership, akin to that of Adam and Eve before the Fall (Gal 3:26-28; Eph 5:21).

²¹In this respect I take issue with feminists influenced by Reich and the Frankfurt School who argue for a return to matriarchy as a solution to patriarchy. See Guyton B. Hammond, Conscience and Its Recovery (Charlottesville, Va.: The University Press of

- Virginia, 1993).
- ²²For an excellent analysis of the relationship between church-sanctioned patriarchy and violence against women see Anne Borrowdale, Distorted Images (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 1-6.
- ²³Hammond, 8.
- ²⁴Anne E. Patrick, Liberating Conscience (New York: Continuum, 1996), 35-36.
- ²⁵The operative word is "interpretations." Along with other "biblical feminists" I believe that when rightly interpreted the Bible does not promote patriarchy but rather describes, critiques and rejects it. That critique includes the radical call to mutuality and partnership between men and women in home, church and society. For a good overview see Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, ed. After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- ²⁶"Since human agency is required for sin, it is clear that institutions and groups cannot sin, strictly speaking...Social sin is considered sin by analogy." See O'Keefe, 19. That is, the individuals who help keep the woman in subjugation sin against her personally. The church sins by analogy. As Peck argues, however, until each individual in a group takes personal responsibility for the evil behavior of the group, the group remains essentially conscienceless and will not change (Peck, 218). Individual Christians need to "own" the sin of the group. This is the essential role of the intercessor/prophet in the OT, such as Moses and Jeremiah.
- ²⁷Schlueter, 256ff.
- ²⁸Part of the difficulty is ignorance on the part of the clergy as to the issues of domestic violence, including the battering cycle and the tendency for abusers to have Jekyll-and-Hyde personalities, with the "dark" side kept at home, behind closed doors. Many abusive "Christian" husbands appear to be charming, persuasive men at church and in public. Marie M. Fortune and James Poling, "The Calling to Accountability: The Church's Response to Abusers," Adams and Fortune, 451-463. Uninformed clergy often think abuse is a problem of anger that gets out of hand. Studies show this assumption to be a myth. Abusers use both violence and sweetness as means of controlling the woman and making her comply with their wishes (Schlueter, 259). The pathological need to subjugate and tyrannize the woman is the issue. Misogyny is a core value for the batterer.
- ²⁹Peter Horsfield, "The Gerasene Demoniac and the Sexually Violated," Adams and Fortune, 146-47.
- ³⁰This problem can be much worse for the victim whose husband is the pastor, when she tries to report the abuse to the husband's supervisor within the church hierarchy (Graham and Fortune, 341). In 1996 I spent time with a pastor's wife from a mainline denomination who fled with her children to another state after her husband repeatedly raped, battered and threatened to murder her. His congregation refuses to believe the abuse happened (because he is charming and doesn't appear to be abusive at church) and continues to follow the pastor's leadership while a legal investigation is underway. A Greek Orthodox woman with whom I am acquainted was denied the Eucharist by her parish priests until she returned to her husband, who abused both her and their children. The priests did nothing to confront the husband, who was a member of the church. Only after the husband committed suicide to "punish" his wife did the priests offer support to the woman.
- ³¹See Jesus' parable of "the Good Samaritan," Luke 10:25-37.
- ³²Alsdurf, 9-10.
- ³³Ibid., 9.
- ³⁴Frances E. Wood, "Take My Yoke Upon You," in A Troubling In My Soul, Emilie Townes, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 39.
- ³⁵"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery'" (NRSV, cf. Mt 19:9).
- ³⁶Mark's account in 10:2-12 leaves no loophole. All divorce is forbidden. This is the Roman Catholic position toward authentic marriage. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic church recognizes that in certain cases a wedding ceremony does not of itself make a marriage, so the possibility of annulment exists in some cases. Annulment recognizes the nullity of some "marriages" that are not true marriages. For an overview of conditions that may indicate nullity see Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1994), §2382-2389, 1625-1628, 1643-1651.
- ³⁷In most mainline Protestant denominations such as the United Church of Christ, on the other hand, divorce is now generally accepted as a tragic part of life in contemporary society which, although grievous and to be avoided, is sometimes necessary. The United Methodist Book of Worship, for example, has a healing liturgy for persons going through divorce. The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 626. The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize dissolubility of truly married persons, but since Vatican II great strides have been made in moral theology, permitting victims of domestic violence who obtain a civil divorce to at least seek annulment. Domestic violence can at times be interpreted as a nullifying circumstance. See Catechism, §1625-1629, regarding interpretations of "consent." While annulment is not guaranteed, it can legitimately be pursued and if granted can be a source of healing for the woman. She can then remarry. See Geoffrey Robinson, Marriage, Divorce and Nullity: A Guide to the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984), 77-78.
- ³⁸Adultery therefore is the only recognized form of marital covenant-breaking. Such a view is not biblical, particularly in light of Malachi 2:16.
- ³⁹Popular speaker and writer in evangelical circles and founder of "Focus on the Family Ministries," psychologist James Dobson writes that a battered woman should separate from her husband only with the intent of proving to him that he has a "severe problem" that he must deal with. Dobson advises against divorce in this case, arguing that the battered woman's purpose "should be to change her husband's behavior, not kill the marriage." James Dobson, Love Must Be Tough (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 148. Dobson goes on to describe how some battered women bring it on themselves by "baiting" their husbands, so they can then embarrass their husbands at work, in church and among acquaintances when others see the bruises. Ibid., 150. Dobson is representative of the common evangelical proscriptio against divorce in all situations except adultery.
- ⁴⁰For case histories of battered women being subjected to this hermeneutic, see Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, eds., Women, Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996); and James

- and Phyllis Alsdurf, Battered Into Submission (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989).
- ⁴¹ 1 Pet 3:2, NRSV.
- ⁴² Rarely ever is the second half of the verse quoted or used in the pulpit: "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment" (NIV). An alternate reading of this verse given in a note in the NIV is: "and I hate a man's covering his wife with violence." Most contemporary biblical scholarship views "the garment" as a reference to the wife. I have argued elsewhere that this verse is actually a case of synonymous parallelism in which divorce and domestic violence are equally reprehensible to God for they both break the marital covenant. In other words, the verse that is used the most to keep women in abusive relationships, *may be the one verse in the Bible which actually and explicitly condemns the covenant-breaking violence of abusive husbands!* See "Divorce and Violence: Synonymous Parallelism in Malachi 2:16," Ashland Theological Journal (1996): 1-8.
- ⁴³ Joyce Hollyday, "The Nightmare of Abuse," Sojourners 17 (February 1988): 5.
- ⁴⁴ The abuse cycle theory consists of escalating tension between the man and woman, which finally results in a violent, degrading attack on the woman. She feels she brought it on by some failure or deficiency. Afterward her partner seems to be remorseful and can be very contrite, bringing gifts, apologizing, weeping, promising never to hurt her again. Swayed by his seeming change of heart and romantic behavior, the woman forgives him. This is the honeymoon stage, which usually doesn't last long. The tension begins to build again and the cycle repeats itself. Sometimes the tension becomes so unbearable that the woman deliberately incites the abuser to attack, just to get it over with so she can experience the respite of the honeymoon phase. Lenore Walker, The Battered Woman (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 56-69. According to Dobash and Dobash, the contrite, loving, obvious honeymoon phase only takes place early in the relationship and not in all violent relationships. According to their study 35 percent of the men apologized after the first attack, 14 percent after the worst episode, and only 8 percent were always penitent. Contrition *only* reoccurred after that if the woman threatened to leave or actually did leave. Joy M.K. Bussert, Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment (New York: Lutheran Church in America, 1986), 51-52.
- ⁴⁵ For an excellent primer on intervention protocol for clergy see Carol Findon Bingham, ed., Doorway to Response: The Role of Clergy in Ministry with Battered Women (Chicago: Illinois Conference of Churches, 1986).
- ⁴⁶ Hans Schwarz, Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 185-86.
- ⁴⁷ For a very helpful discussion of family systems theory and the responsibility of family members in perpetuating alcoholism (which parallels the dynamics of the abusive family situation), see McCormick, 93-95. McCormick distinguishes between the "contextualized freedom" and "limited understanding" of family members as they gradually come to grips with the phenomenon of enablement. His discussion of the difference between moral culpability and responsibility is particularly enlightening concerning people such as the abuse survivor who is still "bound" by a faulty conscience.
- ⁴⁸ Mitzi N. Eilts, "Saving the Family: When Is the Covenant Broken?" in Adams and Fortune, 450.
- ⁴⁹ Schlueter, 260.
- ⁵⁰ Jeanine Sparks, telephone interview by author, 13 November 1997, East Liverpool, Ohio.
- ⁵¹ For a profile on the batterer's personality, characteristics, and the battering cycle from the abuser's perspective see Bussert, 41-53.
- ⁵² Fortune and Poling, Adams and Fortune, 451.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 451-52.
- ⁵⁴ Bussert, 45-46. The inability to feel a range of emotions contributes to the batterer's dependence on his wife, who does all the emotional work for the couple. Part of taking responsibility for himself includes learning to feel all his feelings. This is enormously difficult for men in our culture, who are enculturated to not feel and to regard feeling as a despised feminine attribute.
- ⁵⁵ Fortune and Poling, Adams and Fortune, 453.
- ⁵⁶ Couples counseling is ineffective at best and can actually be dangerous in abusive relationships. Batterers are manipulative and will use the counseling experience to control their wives. The woman usually will not tell the therapist what is really going on since to do so is to invite disaster when she gets home. None of the therapists to whom I refer clients will counsel a batterer and his wife together. Instead they insist on separate counseling for each partner, and will only do marital therapy after the offender has done substantial individual therapy and has participated in an offenders' recovery program (Columbiana County Mental Health Center, Lisbon, Ohio). For more on intervention see Schlueter, 261-62.
- ⁵⁷ Adams and Fortune, 459.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 202-203.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 201-206.
- ⁶⁰ In the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, for example, all clergy were required to attend a two-day seminar on domestic violence in November, 1997. Clergy were educated as to how to respond to battering victims who come for help, how to spot a battering relationship, how to make referrals, resources that are available such as battered women's shelters, speakers, etc. and how to educate the congregation. For a list of resources clergy and congregations can use see Adams and Fortune, 505-509.
- ⁶¹ O'Keefe, 91.
- ⁶² 2 Tim. 2:15.
- ⁶³ In this respect the Protestant church could learn much from the Roman Catholic church. The Roman Catholic sacramental understanding of what constitutes true Christian marriage and the possibility of religious annulment for "in-valid" marriages offer powerful resources for healing.
- ⁶⁴ John 17:21.
- ⁶⁵ There have always been egalitarian pockets within the church, dating back to the time of the Apostles. The 17th century founders of the Society of Friends, George Fox and his wife Margaret Fell, were committed to egalitarian faith. The Friends church has always been anti-sexist and anti-racist. Other examples include 19th century American revival preachers Phoebe Palmer and her husband Walter Palmer, Jessie Penn Lewis, and the early 20th century Keswick Movement, including Oswald Chambers.

Bibliography

- Adams, Carol J. and Marie M. Fortune, Eds. Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- Alsdurf, James and Phyllis Alsdurf. Battered Into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home. Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
- _____. "Wife Abuse and the Christian Home." Daughters of Sarah 13 July/August 1987): 7-10
- Barth, Karl. The Doctrine of the Word. Vol 1.2, Church Dogmatics. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956.
- Bingham, Carol Findon. Doorway to Response: The Role of Clergy in Ministry With Battered Women. Chicago: Illinois Conference of Churches, 1986.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979.
- Bussert, Joy M.K. Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment. New York: Lutheran Church in America, 1986.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church. New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1994.
- Catholic Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Davenport, Gene L. Into the Darkness: Discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, New Revised Standard Version Bible, 1989.
- Dobson, James C. Love Must Be Tough. Waco: Word Books, 1983.
- Ellinger, Karl and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990.
- Finger, Reta Halteman. "The Dangerous Task of Healing." Daughters of Sarah 13 (July/August 1987): 3.
- Fortune, Marie M. and Francis Wood. "The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence: A Study in Applied Feminist Theology and Ethics." Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 4 (Spring 1988): 115-124.
- Garcia de Hare, Ramón. Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.
- Graham, Larry Kent and Marie M. Fortune. "Empowering the Congregation to Respond to Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence." Pastoral Psychology 41 (May 1993): 337-345.
- Heath, Elaine A. "Divorce and Domestic Violence: Synonymous Parallelism in Malachi 2:16." Ashland Theological Journal 28 (1996): 1-8.
- Hollyday, Joyce. "The Nightmare of Abuse." Sojourners 17 (February 1988): 5-6.
- Kroeger, Catherine Clark Kroeger. "Domestic Violence Hits Close to Home." Mutuality (September 1997): 2-3.
- _____, and James Beck, Eds. Women, Abuse and the Bible. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Lattimore, Virgil L. "The Church's Approach to Health Issues and Our Social Environment: Building Boundaries for the Temple of God." The A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review CIX (January 1997): 50-61.
- McCormick, Patrick. Sin As Addiction. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.
- O'Connell, Timothy E. Principles for a Catholic Morality. rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.
- O'Keefe, Mark. What Are They Saying About Social Sin?. New York: Paulist Press, 1990.
- Otis, L. M. "State Farm Charged on P-C Domestic Violence Abuse Efforts." National Underwriter 101 (May 19, 1997): 1, 20, 66, 80.
- Patrick, Anne E. Liberating Conscience. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- Peck, M. Scott. People of the Lie. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983.
- Peters, Ted. Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994.
- Robinson, Geoffrey. Marriage, Divorce and Nullity: A Guide to the Annulment Process in the Catholic Church. Collegeville, MN.: The Liturgical Press, 1984.
- Schlueter, Carol J. "Creating a New Reality: No More Domestic Violence." Currents in Mission and Theology 23 (August 1996): 254-264.
- Schwarz, Hans. Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Sparks, Jeanine, psychotherapist. Telephone interview by author, 13 November 1997, East Liverpool, OH.
- Townes, Emilie M., ed. A Troubling in My Soul. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983.
- Tracy, David. Plurality and Ambiguity. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Tribble, Phyllis. Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart, ed. After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Walker, Lenore. The Battered Woman. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Wallace, Mark I. The Second Naiveté. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995.
- Whitney, Barry L. What Are They Saying About God and Evil?. New York: Paulist, 1989.

The Levite found his concubine back at her parents' home. As the Levite was bringing the concubine back to his own home, he stopped for the night in Gibeah, a town of the Benjamites. An older man insisted, for safety, that the Levite and his concubine stay at his home instead of in the town square. That night, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Found in the Book of Judges, the concubine of a Levite is a story about a woman who is dismembered by her husband after being abused and brutally gang-raped. Feminist biblical scholar, Phyllis Trible writes, "The betrayal, rape, torture, murder, and dismemberment of an unnamed woman is a story we want to forget but are commanded to speak. It speaks of the horrors of male power, brutality, and triumphalism; of female helplessness, abuse, and annihilation. The unnamed Levite, because of his sacred associations, should have manifested a more commendable life. Residing in Ephraim, he took a concubine out of Bethlehem-Judah. As he is spoken of as "her husband," this unfaithful woman was actually a wife with inferior rights. While the Levite was away for four months his wife played the whore against him. When he returned, he sought out his profligate wife, and spoke to her heart about a reconciliation. The Levite and the dead concubine, Jean Jacques Henner. The Levite divides his concubine's body into twelve pieces, medieval manuscript. The concubine dismembered, medieval manuscript. Bible text for the Levite & Concubine. Judges 19. Vietnam photograph.