

Fall 2018

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

a magazine of theological and ethical inquiry

Sex, Gender, Power: A Reckoning



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Sex, Gender, Power: A Reckoning

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COVER ART

Adam and Eve, 2006 (acrylic on masonite)
by Patricia Brintle

INSIDE PHOTOGRAPHY

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From the Dean's Desk



Gregory E. Sterling
The Reverend Henry L. Slack
Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor
of New Testament

From Harvey Weinstein to Les Moonves, from the *Boston Globe's* Spotlight investigation to the Pennsylvania grand jury report on sex abuse in the Catholic Church, from the 2015 Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Survey on Sexual Assault to the biannual reports of the Title IX Office at Yale University, from Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill to Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford, accounts of sexual misconduct have made violence against women and children one of the most pressing moral issues confronting us.

Unfortunately, the cases are not just media reports about strangers in a distant community, they are about people we know and love. A close friend recently told me what happened to her at a mid-size firm. One of her employees called her and told her that he “wanted her.” When she rejected his offer, he coldly said: “If I cannot have you, no one will.” Unnerved at his threat, she reported it to her boss, who callously told her that she must not be a good supervisor and asked her if she wanted a transfer! As hard as this is to believe, it is an episode repeated more than any of us would like to admit.

One positive result of the #MeToo movement is that enough women have come forward so that their voices cannot be silenced. This is certainly true at Yale, where the number of complaints has risen dramatically. The Title IX Office in the Provost Office issues reports about sexual abuse every six months. Prior to the second half of 2015, the average number of complaints was 58 for each six-month period. Since July 1, 2015, the average number of complaints has been 101 for each six-month period. The most recent report contained 154 complaints, the highest number to date. It is not that there have been more occurrences of sexual misconduct during these reporting periods but that more people have reported events.

I have witnessed the horrors of silence. In a church that I once served a man whose wife died was arrested two weeks later for raping his grand-

daughter. I later learned that he had abused his own daughter, but that his wife had kept this quiet out of a sense of shame. He needed psychiatric help, but did not receive it until he had seriously wounded the lives of two young women in his family. These traumas left scars in the hearts of the entire family and church. Silence can have serious consequences for so many.

How can we help? Let me offer a few observations. First, this is fundamentally a problem of power – an abuse of power that leads someone to use another human being for self-gratification and silence them. Second, we must address the structural problem of patriarchy that undergirds this misuse of power. The vast majority of offenders are males. A significant number of writers in this issue correctly point to patriarchy as a major problem. I hope that conservative Christians who hold on to ancient patriarchy will think hard about the implications of the system they support. It undermines the credibility of Christianity as a movement to help people. Third, we must learn to treat one another as human beings, not as objects of desire or pawns to manipulate. The group of students about whom I worry most as a dean is the transgender students. The 2015 AAU report made it clear that they receive more abuse than any other group. I am grateful for their voices in this issue. Fourth, we need to speak up as Christians with one voice against sexual abuse. We are trying to do so through this *Reflections* and through a public panel that we hosted in New York City in September. This is not only a legal issue, it is a moral issue; it is not only a women's issue, it is a human issue; it is not only a Catholic issue, it is a Christian issue. It affects all of us directly or indirectly.

It is not easy to speak about sexual issues; they touch us at the most intimate level. I want to express my deep appreciation to those who have contributed to this issue. I know almost every writer personally. Some speak out of personal anguish; others out of hearts that are heavy with the abuse they have seen; all speak out of a deep concern to overcome one of the greatest moral problems we face. May we all join them for the sake of God, for one another, and for ourselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory E. Sterling".

Gregory E. Sterling, Dean



A 21-year-old domestic Nepalese worker, standing behind a curtain that protects her identity after she suffered abuse and ran away from the host family that employed her in Kuwait, 2010

Photo by Moises Saman

© Moises Saman/Magnum Photos

A Radical Reformation in the Making?



By Mary Clark Moschella

For years, many of us half-knew of sexual abuses going on in Hollywood, workplaces, neighborhoods, academia, or communities of faith, but we mostly ignored them. The #MeToo reckoning has broken through layers of our collective denial. Thoughtful, sentient persons can no longer pretend not to know. The victims of such abuses cannot now be so easily disregarded, demeaned, or discredited. In cases of he said/she said, she might get a hearing, at least. The public outcry has nudged cultural norms forward slightly, in the direction of a more just sexual ethics.

Communities of faith have the opportunity to respond – and to lead. Instead of imitating the slow pace of cultural change by belatedly offering minor reparations to individuals who have been harmed, churches will, I hope, take this moment to do a deeper kind of reckoning.

We can start by listening to the victims' stories, and trying to understand how such abuse has gone on so long, even within houses of worship. We can repent of the harm we have caused, wittingly or unwittingly, by what we have done or what we have failed to do to protect the vulnerable. Examine our theologies and traditions in order to see how we have colluded with the culture in denying the full humanity of women, children, trans persons, and other victims of abuse. Analyze the subtle forces of sexism, racism, classism, and other dynamics that intersect to support sexual violence and allow us to look away from such suffering. Only by confronting social power imbalances, and turning toward God's goodness, mercy, and love, can we claim the moral authority to lead, rather than follow, this recent encouraging cultural change.

Grave Errors

Two recent events illustrate the challenge of power asymmetries embedded in the theology and institutional life of churches. The first example concerns

the Roman Catholic Church and the second the Southern Baptist Convention. In June, Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Juan Barros Ma-

Only by confronting social power imbalances, and turning toward God's goodness, can we claim the moral authority to lead, rather than follow, this recent cultural change.

drid of Orsono, Chile, as well as those of two other bishops in Chile. This was a remarkable turnaround for a pope who only months earlier had defended Barros and accused his victims of calumny, asserting there was no evidence to support their claims of abuse. Fortunately, Francis had the wisdom to ask the Vatican to investigate further. When he was presented with a 2,300-page report based on 64 interviews in Chile, he began to understand his mistake.

For a pope to admit and apologize for his "grave errors" is astonishing. Here Francis models the kind of repentance needed in this moment in history. His words and actions are bound to have a striking impact across Catholic life. Nevertheless, a sincere reckoning with the causes of sexual abuse also must address the imbalances of power that make such damaging misconduct around children and other

parishioners possible, if not likely: the tradition of a celibate male priesthood that is imbued with divine authority and ontological weight, the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry that reinforces notions of male superiority and proximity to God, and the theological rejection of diverse sexualities and gender identities that does intrinsic harm to people created in the image and likeness of God. The recent harrowing Pennsylvania grand jury report about widespread abuse by priests will further test this pope's leadership around this historic moral catastrophe.

The second recent event involves the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and the wave of sexual misconduct allegations it has faced this year. A high-profile case involved Paige Patterson, the former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, who was fired in May after reports that he counseled women to return to their abusive spouses and pray, and also discouraged

Scripture and theology ought not be used as weapons to reinforce social hierarchies of any kind.

women students from reporting that they had been raped. Patterson was a leader of the conservative "biblicist party" that triumphed over the more moderate "autonomist party" in the bitter SBC schism years ago (1979-2000).¹

At the SBC annual meeting in June 2018, protesters carried signs saying "Stop the Abuse." The convention passed a resolution acknowledging that "we deplore, apologize, and ask for forgiveness for failures to protect the abused, failures that have occurred in evangelical churches and ministries, including such failures within our own denomination" ... and "we call on pastors and ministry leaders to foster safe environments in which abused persons may both recognize the reprehensible nature of their abuse and reveal such abuse to pastors and ministry leaders in safety and expectation of being believed and protected."²

Theological Abuse

This public repentance of sexist wrongdoing represents a start. However, it does not go far enough. It does not address the roots of sexist and abusive behavior, which are theological as well as cultural.

It is time for churches across the spectrum, including the evangelical-minded SBC, to reconsider their support of complementarian theology. Complementarity is the idea that God made men and women as equals, but in a specific order of au-

thority, with men preceding women. Therefore, "as Christ leads the church, a man should love and lead his wife and family."³ Women cannot lead men, but husbands should be loving as they lead their wives. The consequences of this asymmetry of power in marriages and families are clear. One party has the upper hand. When women disagree with or disobey their husbands, they can be made to feel guilty, unchristian. When they go to their pastors and report abuse, and are asked, "What did you do to provoke him?" or are told to go home and cook his favorite dinner and pray for him, they are being set up for further harm. There is nothing loving, and nothing Christ-like, in this advice.

Complementarity is used to exclude women from ordained ministry in chaplaincy positions and in thousands of congregations. This blatant rejection of women's vocations means their insights and gifts for ministry are stymied if not lost. It defies logic that many Christian leaders who now decry abuse still want to preserve the notion of complementarity, somehow putting a softer spin on the inequality it entails. At best, this could be described as "healing the wound lightly," a phrase that comes from the prophet Jeremiah: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

A Gospel Rebuke

A deep kind of healing requires a reevaluation of complementarity. Consider how faulty is the logic of the interpretation of scripture used to support this way of asserting men's superiority over women. Biblical scholar Phyllis Trible pointed out many years ago that in the second creation story (Gen. 2-3), "the Yahwist account moves to its climax, not its decline, in the creation of woman. She is not an afterthought; she is the culmination."⁴ More important, scripture and theology ought not be used as weapons to reinforce social hierarchies of any kind. Jesus proclaimed the reversal of the hierarchies he encountered, announcing that "the last will be first" (Matt 20:16). He taught us to love God and neighbor as ourselves, not to grasp for power over each other.

I don't mean to demonize particular communions of faith. As it happens, in the course of my life I have been a part of both church bodies I cite here. I grew up with the wonder and mystery of the Catholic Mass, and even though as a girl I was not allowed to serve at the altar, the Church still served me, by bringing me to a life of faith. My affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention (ironically enough, the church that ordained me) was briefer, but also full of meaning. For 35 years now, I've been

ordained in the United Church of Christ (UCC). It is my love for the churches that makes me believe that we can do better.

As we confront the persistence of sexual violence both within and outside our institutions of faith, we must challenge the underlying asymmetries of power that allow such abuse to continue. Crucial to this is recognizing the full humanity of women, persons of color, immigrants, LGBTQIA persons, children, persons with dis/abilities, poor persons, prisoners, and other marginalized groups. Strong curricula on sexuality are available, such as “Our Whole Lives,” that explain what it means to engage in just and loving sexual relationships.⁵ We must learn to accord respect to all people as full moral agents who can make decisions about their bodies and, related to this, work to ensure equal access to reproductive rights and health care.

In the #MeToo era, when even the pope is apologizing to victims and an evangelical patriarch faces punishment, it’s time for Christians to come to Jesus on these issues. The resources for a radical reformation are at hand in scripture and tradition. Along with our co-religionists, we can choose to ensure that our religious institutions protect the vulnerable and lead the culture into fuller understandings of justice and life-giving human relationships. The goodness and love of God beckon us to move forward with courage and strength.

Mary Clark Moschella is Roger J. Squire Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at YDS and the author of *Caring for Joy: Narrative, Theology, and Practice* (Brill, 2016). She is the co-editor of a new book, with Susan Willhauck, *Qualitative Research in Theological Education: Pedagogy in Practice* (SCM Press, 2018).

Notes

- 1 For a thorough and innovative account of the schism, see Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, *Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen’s Narratives Reinterpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention* (University of Tennessee Press, 2016).
- 2 See www.sbc.net/resolutions/year/2018.
- 3 Campbell-Reed, p. 32.
- 4 Phyllis Trible, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread,” *Andover Newton Quarterly*, 13 (1973), pp. 251-2. For fuller treatment of the story, see Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Fortress, 1978).
- 5 “Our Whole Lives” is a lifetime sexuality education program that is used (in slightly different variations) by the United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association. See these websites for more details: www.ucc.org/justice_sexuality_education_our-whole-lives; and <https://www.uua.org/re/owl>.

The summer I discovered my heart
is at best an instrument of approximation
and the mind is asked to ratify
every blood rush sent its way

was the same summer I stared
at the slate gray sea well beyond dusk,
learning how exquisitely
I could feel sorry for myself.

It was personal – the receding tide,
the absent, arbitrary wind.
I had a small part in the great comedy,
and hardly knew it. No excuse,

but I was so young I believed
Ayn Rand had a handle on truth –
secular, heroically severe. Be a man
of unwavering principle, I told others,

and what happens to the poor
is entirely their fault. No wonder
that girl left me in August, a stillness
in the air. I was one of those lunatics

of a single idea, or maybe even worse –
I kissed wrong, or wasn’t brave enough
to admit I was confused.

Many summers later I’d learn to love

the shadows illumination creates.
But experience always occurs too late
to undo what’s been done. The hint
of moon above an unperturbable sea,

and that young man, that poor me,
staring ahead – everything is as it was.
And of course has been changed.
I got over it. I’ve never been the same.



Summer evening, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1989

Photo by Gilles Peress

© Gilles Peress/Magnum Photos



A Matter of Salvation

An Interview with Stephen G. Ray Jr. '93 M.Div., '00 Ph.D.

Stephen G. Ray Jr. is the newly appointed President of Chicago Theological Seminary. His areas of interest include systematic theology, African-American religion, human rights, and the intersection of religion and politics. His current work focuses on reinvigorating the public square as a place for all, while reclaiming a vital public expression of progressive religion. He is the author of Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility (Fortress Press, 2002), co-editor of Awake to the Moment: An Introduction to Theology (Westminster John Knox, 2016), and co-author of Black Church Studies: An Introduction (Abingdon, 2007). He is also President of the Society for the Study of Black Religion. In October 2018, he was honored by YDS with its award for Distinction in Theological Education. He spoke to Reflections in August.

On patriarchy and that certain tone of voice ...

A question I raise with students is: Is it just a matter of bad actors making bad choices, or are these choices allowed by a whole system of permissions that grant authority to men to do their patriarchal work in the world?

We all tend to grant authority and deference to a certain register of the human voice – a certain masculine tone and decibel level – no matter what the voice is actually communicating. That authority is *already* granted. It's a predisposition, and it allows men to move through the world with the expectation that deference will be granted them.

On the invisible benefits of male dominance ...

One privilege of patriarchy is that it is invisible to those who are privileged by it – invisible benefits, a priceless thing. It would never occur to most men to worry about walking down the street or fearing the comments that others might make about our bodies. A man on the street never, ever has to worry if he takes off his shirt. If a woman does that, she's indecent. There's a racial counterpart: White people never have to think about being white until it is brought to their attention. That's the greatest privilege – never needing to worry about a police

officer when you've done nothing wrong, a worry about law enforcement no matter your station in life.

On the need for Christian stories about women ...

In Christian tradition we don't have any mythic tales beyond Mary that demonstrate the power of women. Instead, the way women function in the Christian mythic cosmos is to enable the ministry of men, starting with Jesus. Compare that to the Old Testa-

We need to view the dismantling of patriarchy as a matter of our own salvation. If we merely try to “be nicer people,” we're already at a disadvantage.

ment. When we read Exodus and Numbers, we see that Moses' sister and wife have more influence on Moses than Aaron does. They were his consultants. Many Christians find this surprising. Christian ecclesiastical structure keeps reinforcing the idea that women are appendages to men's vocations. Until we add some powerful mythic stories to our narrative – meaning-making stories that feature women – then the role of women won't change. Women will be inscribed as appendages to men.

On the definition of family since the 19th century ...

In the mid-19th century, the Protestant model for church began to migrate from the idea of a covenantal community to the model of a family. Partly this was because of Horace Bushnell's influential emphasis on the role of family in Christian education and nurture. At the same moment, the Victorian age was stabilizing the definition of the nuclear family to mean a father who provides, a mother who is the homemaker, and children who benefit from

What we can do is enable the conversations of those whose minds have not been shaped and imprisoned by 20th-century notions of gender.

that arrangement. Connected to this, and unfolding during the same decades, was the restructuring of the racial order after Reconstruction – the subordination of the black population, especially black men, and the idealization of white womanhood. American society was in search of stability after the Civil War. The price of that stabilization, the price of dismantling Reconstruction, was that black people would be subjugated in new ways, and it was decreed that white womanhood would need white men's protection. The only beneficiary of this arrangement was patriarchy.

On deconstruction and reconstruction ...

Only now are people beginning to understand the depths of the problem of systems of domination – some 40 years after the work of deconstruction began in the 1970s. So many of us were shaped by the project of deconstruction, and it's going to take another generation to do reconstruction. In a destabilizing time like the present, if we don't produce new myths to replace the old ones, then the old ones will reestablish themselves in new ways. This is the hard work of redefining what it is to be a man – the critical task if patriarchy is to be subverted. Up to now, we haven't offered enough positive, reconstructive images for living in a way that is authentically resistant to these systems, while being a male of our species. We must discover this together. What we can do is enable the conversations of those whose minds have not been shaped and imprisoned by 20th-century notions of gender, minds that will envision and live out a more humane future.

On the question, "What must I do to be saved?" ...

That's what men need to be willing to ask, "What must I do in order to be saved?" That is, we need to view the dismantling of patriarchy as a matter of our own salvation. If we merely try to "be nicer people," we're already at a disadvantage. No, the stakes have to be higher. The Christian narrative itself needs to tell us that the deconstruction of patriarchal inequality is important to the future of Christian life. That's what gives it the gravity required to create new narratives. And that's not part of the faith narrative right now. We've got to create new stories that become part of an urgent Christian message of an ethical life after patriarchy. If we don't regard it as a matter of our salvation, then it's of no consequence.

What can I do? It's in the nature of privilege that I didn't do anything to get it. So I can't "give it back." The question then is: How exactly will I participate in this structure of privilege? It has to be something more than what you feel in your heart. One thing I can do is use my voice – yes, in the register that people associate with authority and defer to! – but use it in order to subvert those structures of power.

We can't change the rules of attraction, so the potential exploitation of gender – the domination of women (e.g., pornography) – will be ever-present. But we can change the ways patriarchal structure distorts attraction through fetishization that reduces women to body parts. We can do something about that. Human minds are shaped from very early on, all along the way to adulthood, and there are many ways to teach that women are more than appendages of men's power or objects of their desire.

Change is possible. Consider this: Before America, there was no nation in human history where a people had been enslaved and then, less than 200 years after the end of slavery, produced a president of that nation. Change is possible. We just have to dedicate ourselves to doing that work.

A Glossary

Excerpted here are definitions from a Yale University glossary of current terms to describe gender identity and sexual orientation. Since no glossary can encompass all human experience, and these terms continue to evolve, conversing with individuals “remains a respectful way to learn and understand how one defines oneself,” says Yale’s Guide to Gender Identity & Affirmation in the Workplace.

Androgynous: A non-binary gender identity, having both male and female characteristics. Can be used to describe people’s appearances or clothing.

Asexual: A person who does not experience sexual attraction. This term is a self-identity.

Assigned gender: The gender that is given to an infant at birth based on the infant’s external genitals. This may or may not match the person’s gender identity in adulthood.

Cisgender: A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. This is a term that is preferable to “non-trans,” “biological,” or “natal” man or woman.

Cross-dresser: Someone who wears the clothes typically worn by another gender, sometimes only at home, or as part of sexual play, and sometimes at public functions. It can be a self-identity. This term is not interchangeable with transgender, and some people who cross dress may consider themselves to be part of the transgender community, while others do not. (This is a newer word for the older and less preferred term “transvestite.”)

Gender: A set of social, psychological, or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as either feminine or masculine.

Gender-affirming surgery: Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches a desired gender identity. It is only one small part of a transition. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term “sex change.”

Gender binary: The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other.

Gender Dysphoria (GD): Gender Dysphoria or GD is a psychological diagnosis recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and American Medical Association (AMA). This dysphoria is marked by severe distress and discomfort caused by the conflict between one’s gender identity and one’s designated sex at birth. Not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria or are diagnosed with GD.

Gender nonconforming: A person who views their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male.

Genderqueer: A term that is sometimes used to describe someone who defines their gender outside the constructs of male and female. This can include having no gender (agender), being androgynous, or having elements of multiple genders.

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, “gay” and “lesbian.”

Intersex: Describing a person whose biological sex is ambiguous. There are many genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations which make a person’s sex ambiguous (e.g., Klinefelter Syndrome, Adrenal Hyperplasia). Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersex infants a sex and perform surgical operations to conform the infant’s body to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults are speaking out against the practice, accusing doctors of genital mutilation.

Pansexual: A person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all gender identities and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; attraction determines orientation. Sometimes referred to as omnisexual.

Preferred gender pronouns (PGP): Refers to the set of pronouns that a person prefers (e.g., him, he, she, her, ze, hir, they). It is polite to ask for a person’s preferred gender pronoun when meeting them for the first time.

Queer: A term currently used by some people – particularly youth – to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and others find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. “Queer” is disliked by some within the LGBT community who find it offensive. This word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer.

Sex: Refers to biological, genetic, or physical characteristics that define males and females. These can include genitalia, hormone levels, genes, or secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often compared or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

Transgender: A term that may be used to describe people whose gender expression does not conform to the cultural norms and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is also considered by some to be an “umbrella term” that encompasses a number of identities which transcend the conventional expectations of gender identity and expression, including transgender man, transgender woman, genderqueer, and gender expansive. People who identify as transgender may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. Sometimes shortened to the term Trans.

Transition: Altering one’s assigned sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following: social, cultural, legal and medical adjustments; telling one’s family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not necessarily) some form of surgical alteration.

Trans man: A transgender person who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a man.

Trans woman: A transgender person who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a woman.

Transsexual (also Transexual): An older term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. Many transgender people prefer the term “transgender” to “transsexual.” It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.



The sculpture *Gay Liberation* by George Segal, near Stonewall Inn, New York, 1996

Photo by Leonard Freed

© Leonard Freed/Magnum Photos

#MeToo Confronts the Patriarchy



By Marie Fortune '76 M.Div.

In 1976, William Muehl, a YDS faculty member and the editor of this magazine, wrote an article titled “Rape Is a Sexual Act.” He and I had had an ongoing disagreement about this assertion, largely because of my political position at the time that “rape is violence, not extreme sex.”

Here is what Muehl said: “Lately I have begun to wonder about this pervid insistence that the act [of rape] is not sexual in nature, when every counsel of common sense suggests that it is, at least in part. ... [One] reason for our reluctance to acknowledge the true character of rape [is] the fact that the atrocity says something disturbing about the very nature of sexuality.”¹

Ironically, I now agree with Muehl, but only to acknowledge that he is (unwittingly) describing the nature of sexuality in a patriarchal society. Sexual violence does say something disturbing about sexuality precisely because of the way sexuality is socially constructed within the dominant society.

#MeToo has intensified the moral accounting: Every denomination now faces its own reckoning. Survivors are silent no more.

In our patriarchal culture, sex becomes violent and violence becomes sexy, or as legal activist Catherine McKinnon says, “The line between violence and sex is indistinct.”² Muehl was arguing on behalf of the dominant culture that this is an ontological fact, which suggests we cannot change it.

A New Ethical Space

At that time, as a recent YDS graduate beginning my ministry in addressing sexual violence, I supported the argument that “rape is violence, not sex” (Susan Brownmiller’s formulation) in an effort to establish

an ethical distinction. We were trying to create space for a new argument, the assertion that sex should be devoid of coercion, exploitation, abuse, and violence. So ingrained was the patriarchy that there was no real ethical argument against sexual violence. So we endeavored to argue that it was the *violent nature* of rape that determined the *wrong* of rape based on an assumption that violence is ethically abhorrent.

40 Years Later

So here we are 40 years later, still engaged in the same struggle to address rape and sexual violence, still trying to persuade people that this is morally repugnant and illegal. Yes, we have made progress since the early days of the anti-rape movement in the 1970s. Laws have been revised. Some social attitudes have advanced. Some institutional practices have been transformed. Yet the explosive arrival of the #MeToo and Time’s Up movements reveals to us that not enough has changed in these last four decades. We are still living with a version of male sexuality that assumes entitlement to sexual access to vulnerable women, men, children, and youth, with the expectation that such acts of sexual abuse and exploitation by powerful people will be ignored and covered up by other powerful people. We are still living with the knee-jerk responses of disbelief, silencing, shunning, and punishment of victims and survivors who disclose their abuse.

By now I thought we would have achieved a certain consensus that rape is wrong, that sexually abusing children is wrong, that sexual harassment is wrong. But the fact that powerful men continue to

misbehave and publicly brag about it with impunity suggests we are not there yet. We are still living with a boys-will-be-boys tolerance of bad behavior that should be an insult to all men. Evidently it is not.³

Staying Power

Nevertheless, because of the efforts of thousands of women and men in recent years, #MeToo and the related Time's Up movement appear to be bringing us to a pivotal moment, which, if sustained, will mark real progress. Standing against the modern history of patriarchy, #MeToo shows staying power for four reasons:

First, it signals that we have reached a critical mass of survivors coming forward and sharing their experiences of abuse publicly for the first time. We are hearing from women and men from virtually every institution in our society, from Hollywood to the church to the military to the corporation to the government.

Second, we are hearing from a number of women who have by now gained a measure of professional power which has freed them to speak up and

God did not create women and men as victims and victimizers; God created women and men in God's own image.

speak out without necessarily jeopardizing their futures. Particularly in Hollywood, there are now some women who have sufficient status and prestige to be somewhat insulated from the punishment that powerful men have skillfully used in years past to silence and control them. These women are organizing a multiracial response pushing for institutional change in hiring, contracts, etc., and they now have a platform to be heard and taken seriously.

Third, #MeToo has uncovered not only the multitudes of powerful men who have preyed on women and men for years but more importantly it has exposed the networks of protection carried out by complicit bystanders who have helped hide the abusive conduct. This has led to some degree of soul-searching on the part of enablers.

Finally, serious consequences have been leveled against abusers who have harmed those vulnerable to them. People are losing jobs, careers. Some are facing prison for criminal conduct, no longer a slap on the hand with a wink and a nod. The impact of these responses of accountability cannot be overstated. For so many years, women and men disclosed the abuse and exploitation done to them, only to find that they alone bore the consequences,

never those who caused the harm. #MeToo is finally making it possible for people to hear and believe survivors and stop blaming them.⁴

Gendered Violence

The movement reminds us of something else as well: Sexual violence is gendered. Although sexual violence can be committed by men or women against men or women, women are its most likely victims. This fact is only exacerbated by racism and transphobia.

So we can regard #MeToo as a strong if belated reaction to the gendered violence embedded in patriarchy. My definition of patriarchy is this: It's the way the world is organized around gender, the way resources are distributed around gender – to the benefit of men. In short, it's the way things are. Profoundly rooted in societal norms and institutional practices, it is the air we breathe. And it is toxic for us all.

As girls, we women mostly learned that we had no right to set boundaries on our physical, sexual, and emotional spaces. Boys learned that they were entitled to ignore our boundaries and ignore our lack of consent to interact with them. Some boys, depending on race, class, and sexual orientation, grew up to be men with power in institutions. A significant number of these men have chosen to use their considerable power to abuse and exploit those women and men who are vulnerable to them. In patriarchy, being female is considered deficient and defective, which is why infanticide of girl babies continues as a practice in the 21st century. Lurking inside the patriarchal framework, misogyny goes even further. It is the conviction that women are to be hated, silenced, and punished. Thus do violent acts against women and girls as well as trans women become hate crimes, whether in the home, the workplace, or in public.

Men, Where Are You?

Men's voices in this historic moment have been, I notice, few and far between. We have heard mostly from men who are survivors themselves, but not others. So I have pondered: Where are you? Are you talking to each other? Surely there are many questions to weigh. Are you reflecting on your own ministry and work settings, remembering what you've observed or what you participated in? For those of you who have retired, are you waiting anxiously for someone from your past ministry to come forward and complain about your pastoral behavior? Are you feeling unjustly called out for simply being a straight, white male? Are you engaging with the women in your lives to listen to our stories of violence about

which you might be totally unaware? Are you considering what you can do now to stand with survivors of sexual abuse? Are you interrupting acts of harassment, bullying, or assault that you see or become aware of? Are you calling your brothers to account?

How, meanwhile, is the church responding? We have seen several Protestant national leaders respond with strong statements of support for #MeToo. Progressive churches respond on an ad hoc basis to the immediate symptoms of patriarchy and misogyny but rarely as a fundamental contradiction of the human condition. The #ChurchToo movement has provided an outlet for evangelical Christian survivors to come forward, name names, and demand institutional accountability.

A Church Reckoning

Long before #MeToo, the credibility of our churches was shaken to the core – priests sent to prison, bishops covering up or exposed as abusers themselves, other high-profile pastors and teachers credibly accused of sexual misconduct yet rarely held accountable. #MeToo simply intensifies the moral accounting: Every denomination now faces its own reckoning. Survivors are silent no more.

As people of faith we are called to a public witness, but we must do so from a place of confession and repentance as institutions that have repeatedly failed our people. Where is the sustained commitment in our religious institutions? Where are the voices of faith leaders in the public forum? For a number of years, feminist and womanist theologians, biblical scholars and ethicists have challenged and deconstructed the patriarchal pil-

Despite all the rationalizations, there has never been nor will there ever be an excuse for taking advantage of those who are vulnerable to us.

lars of our faith traditions. Yet these efforts are still regarded by many as tangential to the ministry of the church. At stake here is a paradigm shift within and outside the church. It requires the dismantling of patriarchal values and practices that have long distorted the sexual and relational lives of women and men of faith. God did not create women and men as victims and victimizers; God created women and men in God's own image.

How can we, the church, more attentively hear and believe victims? How can we better prepare our pastors and chaplains to be ready to hear and believe? How can we be safe places for children, youth,

and adults? How can we strengthen our policies on misconduct and improve our education on healthy boundaries? Despite all the rationalizations, there has never been nor will there ever be an excuse for taking advantage of those who are vulnerable to us. It remains our task to respond to misconduct, to hold perpetrators accountable, to seek justice for survivors, and heal the brokenness in our churches.

The church should be the first place that anyone who has been abused would come for help. Instead it is too often the last place, or even the source of the abuse itself. A woman or man should be able to seek support from their church knowing they will find a just judge, an advocate, a compassionate community there. Because she or he will find a sweet cool drink of justice there. Let us strive to be that place.

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Notes

- 1 Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (Pilgrim Press, 2005), p.15.
- 2 Fortune, p. 51.
- 3 The latest overt symptom of the state of patriarchy is the online subculture InCel, i.e. Involuntary Celibates. This appears to be a group of heterosexual males who feel entitled to have sex with women but who have experienced rejection by women and thus feel oppressed and need to turn their feelings into a social movement. Unfortunately social media now gives a platform to this misogynist ideology, which is associated with recent acts of mass violence. See Natalie Gil, "What is an 'Incel' Group & Why Do They Hate Women?" refinery29.com, April 26, 2018.
- 4 The "Me Too" movement was actually begun in 2006 by an African-American advocate, Tarana Burke, who was trying to connect with other women of color who were survivors of sexual assault. It was picked up last year with a hashtag by a number of actresses who came forward to accuse Harvey Weinstein of harassment, abuse, and rape.



Women and men waiting for UN food distribution, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2001

Photo by A. Abbas

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AFTER THE EUCHARIST

By Sophia Stid

Soon, I knew, we'd all fail, the world rushing back
loud as horses to fill the space we'd made. But for now:

this tenderness, unlocked inside my jaw. To know there –
in my mouth – that a word is food. To know with my mouth

how a word became food became life became air. The air
I breathed in, sharp, when a professor said to me, "You're

going to need a certain kind of man" – in his office, before
class. He'd asked if he could close the door. My paper

on his desk, my grade circled – *VERY good* – written in red,
ink still wet, writing itself on my mind even now, misplaced

shame I claim as mine – *what had I done to make him think,*
what had I worn – No, I tell my mind. No more replicating

centuries of obfuscated blame. I'll tell you what he wore:
a suit and tie. I took my paper silently and went to class,

where I sat in the back and swallowed words the rest
of the semester. *The Word of the Lord*, we hear in church,

our hands carving crosses into air. And one of those words
is *No* – sacrosanct, sufficient whether felt or said. My prayer.



Becky Posey Williams leads training sessions and talks extensively to clergy and others about how to be alert to the dynamics of power and vulnerability that fuel sexual misconduct. She is senior director for sexual ethics and advocacy at the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) of the United Methodist Church. COSROW has been a prominent advocate for women in the church for decades. Its attention to sexual misconduct includes training for clergy, regular statistical reports, and guidance to alleged victims. The website umsexualethics.org offers resources for prevention of sexual misconduct and responses to it. Williams spoke to Reflections in summer 2018.

What clergy and other leaders need to hear ...

It's important that leaders hear that they have control over what their response is going to be if they face an inappropriate encounter. I tell them: You are moral agents. The burden of safety falls on you. You hold the power. You don't get to blame another person if boundaries are violated.

They need to know how to answer this question: *What will be your response if someone makes a sexual advance on you?* Chances are good that is going to happen. Clergy need to be aware that their inherent power is very attractive to some people. Such individuals find the clergy person appealing and attractive – a charismatic leader who says all the right things! Leaders have to be prepared for this.

Another question to prepare for: *What is your response going to be if you witness someone else crossing a boundary or speaking in a way that's degrading or sexist or sexualized?*

Why abuses are shrouded in silence or explained away ...

We're silent because we don't want to be the ones who get the pastor in trouble. Or we're speechless over what we just witnessed and we just hope and pray it doesn't happen again. Or for some church members it's extremely difficult to believe that someone who is so beloved and revered could be guilty of misconduct. There are other rationalizations I've heard many times. In the case of a demeaning comment: *Oh, that's just John. That's just the way he talks to women. He's been doing that for 40 years. I can assure you I've known him forever and he didn't mean it the way it was interpreted.* But the way it was interpreted and heard was belittling and sexualized, and that's a problem. It's 2018 and we must confront this.

Why do we enable it? One reason may be: We don't want to address the fact that we do that too. Or, it's exactly what we heard in the house when we were growing up, and it's hard to face. But it's time to overhaul these attitudes and beliefs. Holding a person accountable isn't punitive. It's about caring enough about people to bring it to their attention.

How misconduct at church often starts ...

Here's a likely scenario: A layperson reaches out to clergy, the one person you can trust, because you are feeling very vulnerable – your marriage is in trouble, you're worried about being alone and financially insecure. You bring incredible self-doubt and self-questioning to the counseling meeting. Then to have your spiritual leader affirm you as someone who is worthy and desirable! The imbalance of power in this scenario is clear. The possibility of boundary violation is in place.

I tell clergy groups: Unless you're credentialed as a counselor, don't do it. I think pastors are invited to think they must be good at everything. And if word is

Clergy need to know how to answer this question: *What will be your response if someone makes a sexual advance on you?*

out that a minister is good to sit down with, it is easy to get caught up in the approval. Can we as churches have honest conversations about our expectations of clergy and *not* put pastors under the pressure of being counselors? They should be encouraged to refer individuals to other practitioners in town.

The need for a continuous conversation ...

Are we willing to make it a priority to be in continuous conversation about power, gender, and authority? And will we question our assumptions about these things, so we don't keep making the same mistakes? Will we provide the means to assess how we could be better in our responses to complaints of sexual misconduct? Is policing our own the best strategy? Title IX in a university setting might be a model. Whatever the solution, the point is: Are we willing to weave this conversation into our life of faith? We have an obligation to get this right. We *know* it's unacceptable that harassment and abuse are happening in the very place where we are all trying to feed our souls as spiritual beings. This is spiritual violence.

Sex, Theology, and Teenage Choices



By Kate Ott '00 M.A.R.

“We are teaching about sexuality all the time in our churches . . .” When I make this statement to groups of clergy, youth ministers, or parents, many are surprised to hear it. Most don’t include much sexuality education in their programs. So, they wonder, how is it they are teaching about sexuality all the time?

This is my way of pointing out the obvious. In US culture and many Christian traditions, sexuality education is defined very narrowly. It usually takes the form of one youth group evening each year or a staff information session about the sexual abuse pre-

We disempower youth when we institutionally keep silent, or focus only on preventing negative outcomes, or let our teens fumble through their sexual lives led more by mass media than theological reflection.

vention policy. We think of sexuality as something people do – particular acts – rather than as part of who we are and the way we live in relationship with others. Whether we know it or not, in our churches we are signaling attitudes about sexuality, *teaching* it, all the time.

Non-Stop Messages

A broader view of it – one that treats themes of intimacy, sensuality, reproductive health, gender identity, and sexual orientation as well as abuse prevention – is well known in Unitarian Universalist Association and United Church of Christ circles that teach the “Our Whole Lives” sexuality education curriculum. Most of the rest of us rarely understand sexuality in such terms. We should be more alert to the many ways we are teaching about sexuality every day – think of the adult relationships our kids see modeled in church, or the rules about clothing in youth group, or the division of bathrooms in the

church building, or the retreat sleeping arrangement protocol, or how God is named.

Unfortunately, we often miss the impact that these many commonplace messages have on youth – what we value about bodies, how we understand gender or our image of God, and what we’re communicating about who the congregation welcomes. Yet all these issues throughout the year offer teachable moments, an open space for clergy, youth ministers, teachers, and parents to share information and talk. In turn, this approach to education does affect teen choices. There is a common myth that talking with youth about sexuality issues will lead them to engage in sexual behaviors. Actually, the opposite is true. The more information teens have, the better equipped they are to make healthy decisions based on their moral values.

“No Sex Until Marriage”

Which moral values? When congregations do explicitly teach about sexuality, teachers often believe they need to *give* teens a sexual ethic, which is usually boiled down to: “No sex until marriage.” I believe this old instinct needs to be questioned, because the ethic of “no sex until marriage” has been proven ineffective with teens.¹ First, it primarily focuses on one sexual behavior and does not clearly define that behavior.² Second, it is often accompanied by rigid gender and sexual-orientation theologies. Third, it gives no guidance on relationship formation either prior to or after the wedding.

Recently, the relationship of consent and power to sexual conduct has moved to the forefront of national conversation. We send the wrong message

to our teens when we disempower them – take away their consent – and force them into a sexual ethic devoid of lasting foundation in moral values or an understanding of relationship formation. Rather than give teens a behavior-based rule, we should help them form their own sexual ethic.

Seven Ethical Norms

Identifying a foundation of values can help youth build their own sexual ethic. In her 2006 book *Just Love*, Margaret Farley suggests the following seven ethical norms: no unjust harm, free consent, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, and social justice.³ From such a foundation, one can make ethical judgments about certain behaviors and relationships.

In the messiness of teens' lives, we might assume they are not capable of developing a sexual ethic. But that's not my experience. I regularly talk

Rather than give teens a behavior-based rule, we should help them form their own sexual ethic, based on a lasting moral foundation.

with youth groups around the country, and I usually introduce a short exercise to begin building a sexual ethic.

It may take the following shape: The group reads 1 Corinthians 13:1-8:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

We note that Paul was talking to a whole community, not lovers. The interpretation of love he is proposing is a love that looks the same no matter if it is one person, two people, or a whole group. We make a two-column list of what love is and what it is not. Then everyone in the group adds their own values to the two columns. Each teenager is instructed to think about a personal idea of God and Jesus and what the faith community has taught them. Based

Gathered in the youth room with all eyes on me, I open the envelope from the nonprofit mission trip organization. It contains work assignments and other info we've been waiting for. The older teens will work at a construction site, while the younger teens lead a children's camp.

After the excitement of these first details passes, I flip to the last page to read the dress code rules. The list gets specific: no tank tops, no exposed undergarments, shorts must be longer than fingertip length.

Most of the group erupts in boisterous opposition. *What do you mean no tank tops, it's going to be 90 degrees there! You can't always control whether your bra strap shows or not. They don't even make shorts for girls our age that are fingertip length.*

And, finally, the sharpest critique: *All those rules are about policing what girls wear and look like.*

I respond with a bit of levity both to prove their point and to re-establish a manageable noise level in the room. "Well, I'm pretty sure that the boys are not allowed to wear spaghetti strap tank tops or short shorts either." (Pause to let them all groan.) "But I completely understand your point. These specific clothing rules are gender-based and specific to girls."

Instead of telling the kids to accept the embedded gender hypocrisy, I invited a discussion: Why do the rules seem unfair? How do we negotiate between different social contexts based on clothing and religious beliefs? If our bodies are part of God's good creation, how does the clothing we choose communicate that we honor our bodies, are grateful for them, and respect others' different bodies? After a fascinating conversation about these gendered negotiations, we came up with a few rules:

1. Clothing should be chosen based on safety and comfort.
2. It should reflect an understanding of and respect for the cultural and religious customs of the host region.
3. Most importantly, it should always reflect an appreciation for the gift of our bodies as created by God. That doesn't mean we have to cover them up – or flaunt them as objects.

For those working in the Bible camp (not doing construction), these rules meant thicker strap tank tops for boys or girls and a minimum length for girls' shorts (3-inch inseam). These adjustments were attentive to the weather, the activities of Bible camp, their own comfort level, and a thoughtful negotiation of who they are as embodied people created in God's image.

– Kate Ott



High school party, Brooklyn, 1991
Photo by Eli Reed
© Eli Reed/Magnum Photos

on that theology, I ask them to select the top five values important to them in a friendship and in a love relationship. Most often, the five values are the same for both friendship and romance, words like honest, kind, trustworthy, mutual, and patient. When I ask the teens to pair off and give examples from scripture or from their theological beliefs that support their value selections, mostly I overhear

There is a common myth that talking with youth about sexuality issues will lead them to engage in sexual behaviors. Actually, the opposite is true.

instances of how Jesus treated others. They also give concrete examples of what the value looks like in a relationship.⁴ One teen might say patience means waiting for a romantic partner to be comfortable and ready to kiss for the first time. Another will describe being trustworthy and honest as speaking up for a friend when rumors spread.

By the end of this exercise, the teens have identified a theological foundation of five values for determining how ethical a relationship is. When we are done, I suggest to them that they need all five values before they can engage in sexual activity – and the decision to engage in a behavior would have to support and deepen the values. In most cases, they groan, and one brave youth says something like, “But that’s really hard.”

Indeed, creating healthy sexual relationships is difficult work at any age. The sooner we cultivate a values-based foundation with our children and teens, the better equipped they will be to nurture a sexual ethic that will serve them in all relationships – their friends, lovers, and their own sense of self. We disempower youth when we institutionally keep silent, or announce sexual decrees, or focus only on preventing negative outcomes, or let our teens fumble through their sexual lives led more by mass media than theological reflection.

We can empower youth if we address sexuality issues in their myriad everyday forms. Our religious communities can furnish access to information, model a variety of healthy sexual relationships, and build strong interpersonal relationships – all grounded in their faith values.

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Notes

- 1 See Anthony Paik, Kenneth Sanchagrin, and Karen Heimer, “Broken Promises: Abstinence Pledging and Sexual and Reproductive Health,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78 (2016), pp. 546–61, and Christopher Trenholm et al. “Impacts of Four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs: Final Report,” Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., a Congressionally funded evaluation submitted to the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, April 2007, accessed on July 30, 2018 at <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/impacts-of-four-title-v-section-510-abstinence-education-programs>.
- 2 According to research, youth have varied definitions of abstinence. Many interpret “no sex until marriage” as only including one or two forms of sexual intercourse, so they try other kinds of sexual acts, often unprotected. See, Mark D. Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2007), and Melina M. Bersamin, Deborah A. Fisher, Samantha Walker, Douglas L. Hill, and Joel W. Grube, “Defining Virginity and Abstinence: Adolescents’ Interpretations of Sexual Behaviors,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 41, no. 2 (2007), pp. 182–188.
- 3 Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (Continuum, 2006), p. 231.
- 4 Kate Ott, “Contemplating Sex: Sexual Ethics for Today’s Teens,” *Leader’s Guide and Participant’s Handout*, TheThoughtfulChristian.com, 2013.

Machismo, Mutuality, and #MeToo in Corinth and America



By Gregory E. Sterling

We have almost become inured to the stories about sexual abuse. I say almost because, despite the frequency of the reports, I hope that we all still feel a sense of moral outrage and shame at these egregious acts of human misbehavior. Though these purulent acts are played out sexually, they are fundamentally about power: They are actions of people who have power over others and exercise that power blindly for self-gratification without concern for the other person. As Judith Butler tersely put it: “sexuality and power are coextensive.”¹

These actions are far more commonly committed by men than by women, although there have been several celebrated cases of the latter recently. Over the last three years (July 1, 2015-June 30, 2018), the Title IX Office at Yale University has reported that 86 percent of the complaints for sexual misconduct

Paul challenged those who denied sexuality within a relationship (marriage in 1 Cor 7). Sexuality is about more than procreation. It includes eros. However, it is not a libertine eros.

were against males, 3 percent against females, and in 11 percent of the cases the gender was unknown. One obvious reason for the disproportionate numbers is that men have been in positions of power or have been socialized to think and act within such a system. The correlation between sexual abuse and patriarchy is not an inevitable consequence – there have been many males who supported patriarchy but were not abusers of others – but patriarchy as a system is a contributing factor.

Two Surprises

As a New Testament scholar I have thought about a series of statements by Paul in First Corinthians that are quite surprising in light of the patriarchy

of the 1st and 21st centuries. In his letter Paul is responding to arguments that are circulating in the Corinthian community. At the start of 1 Cor 7 he makes this statement: “Now concerning those matters about which you wrote, ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman’” (1 Cor 7:1). Here the verb translated “touch” serves as a euphemism for sexual relations (see also Gen 20:6). It is characteristic of Paul to offer a qualification to the Corinthians’ arguments, agreeing with the basic statement but not *tout court*. In this case, Paul qualifies a Corinthian advocacy of asceticism in two unexpected ways.

The first surprise is that Paul speaks of the same sexual rights for wives as for husbands in a series of three parallel statements (1 Cor 7:2-4).

First Parallel:

But because of sexual immorality let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

Second Parallel:

Let the husband give his wife her conjugal rights, and let the wife do the same for her husband.

Third Parallel:

The wife does not exercise power over her own body but the husband; similarly, the husband does not exercise control over his own body but the wife.

This is an unusual set of statements in Paul’s letters. The only other passage where the Apostle treats the sexuality of women and men equally is in his critique of the same sex-relations of the pagan

world in Rom 1:26-27. A more representative sample of what we would expect is in 1 Thess 4:3-8 where Paul apparently speaks about the role of the male but not the female (if “vessel” refers to wife rather than body).

The second surprise is that Paul recognized a valid erotic dimension in sexuality that transcended procreation. This perspective is implicit in the opening three parallel statements and explicit in

In Paul’s era it was commonplace among both Stoics and Jewish authors to argue that sex was intended for procreation and only for procreation.

their conclusion and in the subsequent discussion. The Apostle concludes by returning to the concern that led to the three parallels: “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by consent for a period of time to devote yourselves to prayer and then come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Abstinance should be a mutual decision and only temporary. Though Paul preferred that everyone be single as he apparently was, he realized that this was not suitable for all (1 Cor 7:5-7). The reality of the human need for sexual expression becomes even more pronounced in his famous comment to the unmarried and widows that immediately follows. The Apostle writes that “if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion (literally, burn)” (1 Cor 7:8-9).

We take the erotic in sexual relations for granted today; however, in Paul’s era it was commonplace among both Stoics and Jewish authors to argue that sex was intended for procreation and only for procreation. For example, Paul’s Jewish contemporary, Philo of Alexandria, thought “desire” was the im-

If we viewed sexual relations as a serious bond between two people with equal rights who are mutually supportive, we would not need a #MeToo movement.

pulse for all evil. In the case of sexuality, legitimate desire for sex to procreate can become an illegitimate desire.² In his exposition of the prohibition against adultery, he warned against desire, even in marriage: “natural pleasure is very often greatly at fault whenever someone uses it immoderately or excessively as when ... those who love women are mad for intercourse and behave lustfully not with

the wives of others but with their own wives.”³ Philo thought that any intercourse other than intercourse for procreation was lustful behavior. By contrast, Paul’s complete silence about begetting children is thunderous.

Paul in the First Century

How should we explain these statements, and do they have any bearing on the contemporary issue of sexual abuse? We need to understand Paul before we think about the contemporary relevance. Paul’s own statements have been read against at least three different backgrounds. Some have read these statements against the specifics of Paul’s give and take with the Corinthians. For example, Wolfgang Schrage argued that Paul’s basic view is offered in 7:2 in contrast to the Corinthians’ claim in 7:1. Marriage is, on this reading, not simply a safety valve between immorality and celibacy – as so many interpreters assume – but a gift from God just like celibacy.⁴

Others have attempted to identify a specific group within Corinth that Paul was contesting. For example, Ann Wire suggested that there was a group of Corinthian women prophets who advocated celibacy as a means of liberating themselves from male domination.⁵ On this reading, Paul imposed limits on these women prophets by urging them to engage in sexual relations with their husbands.

Still others have attempted to read these statements against the background of Stoicism. In particular, Will Deming placed the opposing viewpoints in 1 Cor 7 against the background of “the Stoic-Cynic marriage debate.”⁶ Like Epictetus, Paul argued that marriage may be acceptable for the average person but not for the mature (in Epictetus’s view, the Cynic).⁷ For Deming, Paul situated marriage and celibacy within the debates of the larger society and viewed the choice between the two as a matter of expediency. It was the early Christian writers, not Paul, who later pitted sexuality over against spirituality.

These three examples are far from a comprehensive overview of the way that modern scholars have read Paul’s statements, but they illustrate the challenge of reconstructing an ancient exchange when we only have one side of the conversation.

I have always been struck by the fact that Paul addresses a concern for libertinism in 1 Cor 6:12-20 and immediately turns to address a concern for asceticism in 1 Cor 7:1-7. There must have been different groups within Corinth whose sexual practices varied appreciably. The unusual emphasis on the rights of women in 1 Cor 7 suggests that Ann Wire may be right about a group of women prophets who were advocates of celibacy. Whether or not this spe-

cific identification is accurate, some Corinthians advocated it. Paul's attempt to address it appears to have drawn on philosophical discussions from the larger world even though he gave his own judgments.

Love and Libertinism

But how does this affect us? I think that the two surprises of this text are directly relevant to our time. Sexuality is about more than procreation, it includes eros; however, it is not a libertine eros. Paul opposed this in 1 Cor 6. What is common in both the discussion in 1 Cor 6:12-20 and 7:1-7 is that Paul conceived of sexuality as a powerful factor in a relationship: On the one hand, he challenged the libertines who thought that sexual relations were on a par with eating and did not understand why visiting prostitutes was anything more significant than a meal (6:12-17); and, on the other hand, he challenged those who denied sexuality within a relationship (marriage in 1 Cor 7). For Paul, sexuality was meaningful and should not be treated cavalierly. He recognized that it was more significant than sharing a meal and that its absence in marriage could undermine the relationship. The importance that he attached to sexuality is in stark contrast to most cases of sexual abuse that treat sexuality as a means of self-gratification rather than a bond within a relationship.

Wives, Husbands, and Holy Writ

Perhaps even more striking is Paul's language of mutuality: Husbands and wives have equal sexual rights. It calls not only for the recognition that each party in the relationship has the same rights as the other, but that each party is obligated to address the concerns of the other. I cannot think of any contemporary case of sexual abuse where mutuality as Paul understood it was at work.

The reason why we read the biblical text is because it helps us. I realize that readings of the biblical text have often been used to hurt human beings, but the text has the power to improve the human situation. If we viewed sexual relations as a serious bond between two people with equal rights who are mutually agreed and supportive of one another, we would not need a #MeToo movement. The mutuality of this text stands over against the machismo that has been far too prevalent in our culture for too long.

Notes

- 1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 1990), p. 40.
- 2 See Philo, *Creation*, §§ 151-152.
- 3 Philo, *Special Laws*, §§ 3.9.
- 4 Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 4 vols., Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 7 (Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991-2001), 2:83.
- 5 Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Fortress, 1990), pp. 79-97.
- 6 Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*, Society of New Testament Monograph Series 83 (Cambridge University Press, 1995; rev. ed., Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 5-49.
- 7 Epictetus, *Dissertations* 3.22.76; 4.1.147.

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Stonewall 25th anniversary parade, New York, 1994

Photo by Constantine Manos

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“I wouldn’t want to be a straight white man. Not if you paid me. Although the pay would be substantially better.”

– comedian *Hannah Gadsby*

Hannah Gadsby is tired of jokes, the desperate logic of jokes. A successful joke simply requires a set up, then a punchline. It depends on creating tension in the room, then defusing the tension with laughter, she says. But as a lesbian from a small Australian town, she’s been the tension in the room all her life. And the only way to defuse it was to use self-deprecation: She was the punchline. She got laughs at her own expense. It worked, and she became a professional comic. But it



was humiliating and did nothing to change society. Now she’s done with that.

With a sweet light touch and smoldering fury, she talks about this in a new Netflix hour-long special called *Nanette*. The show has become a sensation, a new kind of culture critique, an interrogation of patriarchy, also a takedown of the eager-to-please comedy subculture that merrily accepts the warped sexism in our midst.

Gadsby tells a story: She was talking to a woman at a bus stop when the woman’s boyfriend showed up and got angry because he mistook Gadsby for a man – a gay man. That gets some laughs, on cue. What Gadsby doesn’t say (until later) is that the guy then severely beat her. Nothing funny about that.

She’s using a comedy forum to talk about the dangerous misogyny and homophobia that terrorizes her life and others. She turns to the straight men in the audience: “Power belongs to you. And if you can’t handle criticism, take a joke, or deal with your own tension without violence, you have to wonder if you are up to the task of being in charge. I’m not a man-hater. But I’m afraid of men. If I’m the only woman in a room full of men, I am afraid. And if you think that’s unusual, you’re not speaking to the women in your life.”

It’s disarming to laugh with a comedian who then slowly reshapes the evening into a series of painful moments of truth. Misogyny – “hating what you desire” – is a crippling contradiction, a mental illness, she declares. Picasso disrespected women,

but he gets a pass because he was the genius who invented cubism. From there Gadsby ponders the Clinton sex scandal of 20 years ago, and the consequences we are paying now for tolerating a president’s behavior.

“Do you know who used to be an easy punch line? Monica Lewinsky. Maybe if comedians had done their job properly and made fun of the man who abused his power, then perhaps we might have had a middle-aged woman with an appropriate amount of experience in the White House, instead of, as we do, a man who openly admitted to sexually assaulting vulnerable young women because he could.”

This is, I believe, Gadsby’s only mention of American politics in her show, but it touches on a molten source of our turmoil since the 2016 election campaign: a male fear of women seeking power. For decades, the hatred of Hillary Clinton has been intense. It has also been disproportionate. Various studies say lots of men feel threatened by a woman near the center of power because they fear subordination, a loss of status (many traditional women fear the loss of male status too), writes Peter Beinart in *The Atlantic*, summarizing various research.*** The “precarious manhood” theory says womanhood arrives naturally and permanently, but manhood must be proved and earned and can be lost. Many feel society is getting too feminized. Women in power are judged more harshly than men. Women who deviate from traditional female roles are more likely to be sexually harassed, Beinart writes.

Strange that a comedy show could become a galvanizing platform for truth-telling about gay life and male anxiety. That’s how rare the conversation happens anywhere else.

By the end of *Nanette*, Hanna Gadsby says she’s angry and has a right to be. But that doesn’t get the last word. She says she doesn’t have the right to spread anger.

“Because anger, much like laughter, can connect a room full of strangers like nothing else. But anger, even if it’s connected to laughter, will not relieve tension. Because anger is a tension. It is a toxic, infectious tension. And it knows no other purpose than to spread blind hatred, and I want no part of it.”

*** Peter Beinart, “Fear of a Female President,” *The Atlantic*, October 2016, pp. 15-17.



A child sex offender, Birmingham, England, 1992

Photo by Peter Marlow

© Peter Marlow/Magnum Photos



Harold W. Attridge, Sterling Professor of Divinity at YDS, was dean of the School from 2002-2012 – the first Roman Catholic appointed to the position. He has written widely on New Testament exegesis, Hellenistic Judaism, and early church history. As a Catholic churchgoer and layman, he spoke to Reflections in September, soon after a grand jury report of widespread child abuse by priests in Pennsylvania over decades as well as mounting controversy around Pope Francis's response to the crisis, and new demands that bishops be more accountable and transparent in the way they handle allegations.

On the perils of the moment and reforms now in place ...

It's obviously been a terrible testing time for the Catholic Church. The horrible story of the pedophile scandal has been with us 16 years now – the church's great failure to protect minors and vulnerable adults from harm. Important new commitments have come out of this traumatic period. The "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" (the "Dallas Charter") was produced in 2002 and has seen revisions in 2005, 2011, and this year. It has several provisions, which include ensuring a safe environment for children, making prompt responses to allegations, cooperating with civil authorities, and disciplining offenders. By now many dioceses have created new structures and protections – training staff, vetting, putting an oversight body in place. Each diocese is now expected to have a review board that advises the bishop in case of an allegation. The majority of members of the review board are to be laypeople who are not employed by the diocese. I'm glad to see the letter that the Hartford archdiocese's Office of Safe Environment released in August, outlining the detailed pragmatic steps it has taken – children's training, adult training, thorough background checks. The National Review Board, which advises the bishops on the crisis, came out with a very strong statement, saying there needs to be real change in the Church's culture, "specifically among the bishops themselves."

On the future of celibacy ...

Any number of people have said there are some more fundamental things the Church could do. One of them is to reconsider celibacy. It's clearly a church rule that wasn't adopted as mandatory until the High Middle Ages in the Latin Church. There's no *theological* reason to have a general rule that says

celibacy must be necessary for ordination. After all, Eastern Rite Catholics and Orthodox have married priests. (That is, married men can be ordained, but an unmarried priest cannot marry.) And the Latin Church includes a number of married priests who came into the Church from another denomination.

There remains another perennial question about ordination: Will women ever become Catholic priests? I'd have to answer: Not in our lifetimes. This is something I would like to see, and the current exploration of ordaining women deacons, which happened in the early Church, may lead to women's ordination, but it will be a long time coming.

On eliminating clergy privilege ...

Another idea on the table – in Australia, for example – is to eliminate clergy privilege in the confessional. A proposal there stipulates that priests must report abusers if they hear about it in confession. Until recently that rite has been protected: Clergy aren't required to reveal what is said to them in confession. Many Catholic leaders are opposing it, saying the law won't have the desired effect. It will just discourage people from going to confession. The Archbishop of Sydney says the law won't protect children but ensure that the subject never comes up in confession.

On checks and balances and sin ...

Some will argue that we should be able to dismantle abuses of power by doing away with the hierarchy, the whole edifice. I don't see how that's the solution. Wherever two or three are gathered, someone will be in charge. Five hundred years ago, the Reformation called for the elimination of celibacy, the elimination of bishops – hierarchies – and we might say the results were mixed. Abuse of power still happens. Sin will be a reality as long as there are humans. Politically speaking, the nation's founding fathers thought about this problem and installed a set of checks and balances to restrain the authority of any one branch of government. I think the Church is moving in that direction – checks and balances. Progress is slow. But the framework is there to recognize a sharing of authority, a recognition that the authority of bishops isn't absolute. I certainly hope that the Church addresses the structural problems laid bare by the continuing sexual abuse scandals. Dealing with the issue must involve not just the traditional hierarchy, but also lay men and women. I believe that the current scandals will lead the faithful to insist that they have a vital role to play in assuring the Church's adherence to its highest ideals. I certainly hope that the bishops agree, otherwise their continued leadership will be problematic.

Stop Dehumanizing Transgender Christians



By Angel Collie '14 M.Div.

Tattooed on my left arm is an anatomically correct heart with my interpretation of a God-shaped hole in it. It represents a time in my life when everything I'd been raised to believe came crashing down, and the connection I'd always known with God got ripped away.

It represents a time when I was called off the altar in the middle of prayer and told I was making a mockery of the church with my piercings and “homosexual” colors. I was told God hated my “sin,” after which I publicly endured a litany of biblical passages about how I was sick, sinful, and an abomination. It was the darkest time of depression in my life, when I wondered what was the point of living

The church temptation is to skip the difficult work of removing practices that cause harm to LGBTQIA folks – and just put a rainbow sticker at the front entrance.

knowing I'd disappointed God, my church, and my family. Sadly, my story isn't unique. In fact in some details it is mild compared to the violence others have suffered in the name of faith.

Mutual Hostility

Regarding the full welcome of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) people, the Christian church as a whole has an abysmal track record. Granted, hostility exists on both sides: Religiously inspired hatred has often been matched with disdain towards congregational life from queer and trans communities. At times, it is just as hard to be Christian in queer and trans communities as it is to be queer in some Christian congregations.

But the responsibility for repairing the harm is on the church, I believe. The church must find a way

to commit itself to practices that undo years of pain perpetuated by homophobia and transphobia. This spiritual violence has real consequences. In many cases churches have encouraged the tearing apart of families, excommunicated faithful followers, or remained silent when human rights were under attack. Theological death-dealing has led far too many to conclude suicide was the only option after the wounding experience of being shunned from their faith and families.

Repairing the harm won't come easy. But those who have caused pain have a duty to explore faithfully what kind of costly or uncomfortable learning is necessary to dismantle the heteronormative, cisnormative, patriarchal trappings – the presumption of heterosexual and cisgender superiority or prerogatives – that damage the church as a whole. When it positions itself as a stumbling block for LGBTQIA folks, the church diminishes everyone's proximity to oneness in Christ.

It's rarely simple, but churches looking to make lasting change must adopt a both/and approach – big-picture efforts to deconstruct the systemic power structures of heterosexism and cissexism while also altering the day-to-day practices that cause distress to LGBTQIA folks in the congregational setting. The temptation is to skip this difficult work and just put a rainbow sticker at the front entrance.

But before displaying that decal on the door, one starting place is to challenge the ways compulsive heterosexuality and gender are reinforced by gender-exclusive Bible studies, retreats, call and responses, song parts, restrooms, sermons, and sacraments.

How often in prayers and liturgies are “brothers and sisters” lifted up, rendering non-binary and gender nonconforming folks invisible? A holistic shift is needed to create a culture of inclusion in the life of the congregation.

New Connections to God

The words a community uses in prayer say a lot about who the congregation intends to lift up. One way to reform the language is to refer to God not only in masculine or feminine terms but in the many names that are gender non-specific: Parent, Creator, the Divine, God, among others. The point is not to take God the Father or Mother God away from those who find comfort in those images but to expand the language so more individuals can connect with God and see themselves reflected in their creator.

Likewise we can alter the ways we refer to one another in worship. Gender non-specific language can act as a crucial point of inclusion in our stories, liturgies, prayers, and greetings: Words like siblings, friends, family, members, and children affirm relationships without evoking a gendered expectation. Hearing such gender non-specific words will help us find a place of “fitting in.” It is important that queer and trans people see themselves included in the sermons, stories, pictures, on the website, and in publicity materials. Going up for commu-

Going up for communion, people often have the dismaying experience of someone blessing them with the wrong pronouns.

nion, people often have the dismaying experience of someone blessing them with the wrong pronouns. That small but significant failure to see fully the person in front of you turns a potential moment for oneness in Christ into another site of rejection. If in doubt it is always better to ask someone their pronoun or don't use pronouns at all rather than assume.

Turning to music, in some churches it is traditional for the call and responses to be divided by gender. Consider separating or designating parts by the location of people in the room or by voice – for example, bass, tenor, soprano, and alto. This is also more inclusive of churchgoers whose voices for whatever reason may not fit within the range expected of them based on their gender identity, and it helps keep anyone from feeling alienated or ashamed.

Many congregations will divide the church for small-group and ministry purposes – men's prayer breakfast, women's auxiliary meetings, men's and

women's retreats. These are meaningful spaces of personal spiritual development. But they can be very alienating for transgender and gender nonconforming folks who do not fit either or wouldn't be welcomed in the space most affirming for them. If such divisions must be made, it is important to allow people to choose the group most fitting to them and how they identify. Even the slight shift to saying the “prayer breakfast for male-identified and aligned folks” can work to maintain a sense of community and signal belonging for transgender, non-binary and masculine-of-center individuals.

A word about restrooms: It is helpful to provide single-stall gender non-specific bathrooms as an option for those uncomfortable with men's and women's restrooms as the only options. Many gender nonconforming folks have no safe place to go and are forced to choose denying themselves or putting themselves in harm's way. Gender non-specific restrooms not only send a message of welcome but provide a space for people who may have a caretaker or children of another gender.

People Made Visible

It is strong testimony for a church to make queer and transgender people visible in all elements of worship and leadership. In doing so, this might call many church bodies to undertake a review of their most sacred guiding documents, since many bylaws and constitutions systemically exclude individuals with marginalized sexual orientations and gender expressions. Empowering queer and transgender folks is important not only for the individuals involved. It's decisive that others see us active across the church, enriching the life of the body of Christ.

Even if some of these steps seem too radical for where you are now, just agreeing to stop causing harm can go a long way. It's important to start somewhere. The very future of the church depends on addressing the truth that when any of us experience the dehumanizing effects of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, cissexism, or classism, the whole of the body of Christ is dehumanized.

The metaphorical God-shaped hole in my heart caused by the spiritual violence in the name of God could only be healed by radical welcome into a community of people who loved and worshipped God and gave me permission to do the same – because of and not despite of all of my identities. Such is my prayer for the future of the church, and for everyone in it.

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A transgender woman at home, Birmingham, Alabama, 2017

Photo by Matt Black

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Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at YDS, Linn Tonstad is a constructive theologian working at the intersection of feminist and queer theory. Her first book, God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexual-

ity, and the Transformation of Finitude (Routledge, 2016), was named a best new book in both ethics and theology by Christian Century last year. Her latest book is Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics (Cascade, 2018). Born to Norwegian-Iraqi parents, she grew up in Norway as a Seventh-day Adventist. She says her theological interests are animated by a cherished Adventist theme: each person's responsibility to investigate the truth. She spoke to Reflections in June.

The value of queer theory for theology ...

As I see it, queer theology isn't a celebration of particular sexuality but a way of facing the radical nature of the Christian gospel and unmasking the tyranny of exclusion – society's brutal game of saying who's out and who's in. Queer theology is a method of questioning the demands made by the social order on *all* people – society's enforced definitions of what's normal and abnormal, who's acceptably human and who isn't. Queer theology works from the margins and thrives there. Like certain kinds of Protestantism, it has a suspicion of ideas of wholeness and self-possession. It works hard to remind us that we human beings may be more mysterious to ourselves than we recognize.

Many of us in gender and sexuality studies have been trying to say that there's a lot of complexity and messiness – a lot of contradiction – around sexual identity and ethics. The way women get punished for being both too timid and too aggressive, for instance – it's lose/lose. Queer and feminist theologies help us recognize patterns of contradiction and interlocking oppressions.

The trouble with the Christian debate on sexuality ...

Both sides often take similarly bankrupt forms. Opponents of the full participation of queer persons commonly resort to proof-texting – tearing texts out of place and history, deploying them as weapons, shutting down debate. Proponents of the full participation of queer persons tend to respond by an anemic assertion of the historical difference between sexuality then and now, followed by self-congratulatory statements about God's love for everyone. These debates produce exhaustion and boredom and have done little to advance thinking about sexuality or to deepen theological reflection. (see Tonstad, *God and Difference*, p. 3.)

On misusing language to capture God ...

There's a sense among a lot of Christians that if we can find ways to image God in feminine terms, then we can undo the damage of sexism. I'm not that optimistic about that. I don't think symbol systems work so transparently or directly. I'm not against inclusive language and liturgy – let's try it out whenever we can! But symbols are more likely to *catch up* with lived experience than *produce* lived experience.

The imagination of replacement – replacing God the father with God the tender mother – presumes a symmetry that isn't present. It's very hard to take something that's been devalued, like female images, and present them suddenly as valued replacements.

On the sin of seeking an ethical safe spot to land ...

I want to resist the sense of closure about arriving at a safe spot to stand on the question of ethics. We all have a tendency to do that – find that safe spot and stand there, and define it as good, and see ourselves as being good for standing there. Precisely at that moment, when I conclude that I am good, is likely the moment when I am unaware of the fact that I'm not so good. This wariness is, to me, a Protestant instinct – to resist that closure and admit I am a mystery to myself, with all kinds of evasive strategies of presenting myself to others as good and saying to myself, "I'm not a sinner like they are."

My notion borrows from Kierkegaard's warning about Christendom: There's all kinds of ways of externalizing our ethical systems in order to disavow our own responsibility. He's hard on the individual, the individual's strategies of self-preservation. But he argues for the security that God provides when we make ourselves honestly vulnerable – the security of insecurity.

On the role of gender in Christian identity ...

Should gender be at the center of Christian identity? Absolutely not. But people keep making it the center, leaving us no choice but to deal with it. So we get debates like "homosexuality – yes or no?" and denominations split over it, and ministers go on trial over it. What if it weren't at the center? What if something else was? What if our practices centered around the phrase from Acts 2, "they held everything in common," which might enact the Eucharistic vision of one body, or around a complete reconfiguration of structures of power and the elimination of poverty? I don't think the gospel should stand or fall on a particular stance on sexuality or gender.

Off Balance: Facing the Truth about Power



By Emily M. D. Scott '06 M.Div.

... You sit waiting, humiliated and guilt-ridden, in the hall outside the office of the bishop. It's been 23 years and a suicide attempt, but now you're ready to speak about the abuse. When the bishop beckons you in, he is seated behind an imposing mahogany desk. He listens gravely, and assures you the priest had been moved. You try to protest but he waves your concerns away. "It was a long time ago," is all he offers. After that, the letters you send go unanswered.

...

... Five years ago you left your job and started seminary to follow your call toward ordained ministry. Your spouse was uprooted, your kids changed schools. All this, so you can serve in a church that seems continually confused by you. Half Black, half Puerto Rican, you've been a member of this denomination since birth, yet sitting in your final set of ordination interviews, one committee member keeps asking about your "formation," as if a lifetime in this denomination isn't enough. Someone asks about balancing kids and your call, a question you're pretty sure they wouldn't ask your husband. You would complain, but the only person to complain to is the bishop, who holds your future in his hands. You're underwater financially now – \$80,000 in student loans. Sometimes it feels like this process doesn't want you, but wants you to conform to some unnamed norm of "what a pastor looks like."

...

... The church member stares at your breasts instead of meeting your eyes in the receiving line. He's 30 years your senior, a high-up executive somewhere, a top donor at the church. After council meetings he waits until everyone's left and offers to walk you to your car. It makes the hair on the back of your arms stand up. You make a habit of ducking out immediately after the closing prayer, missing the opportunity to connect with other congregants. You think about telling your senior minister, but he's 30 years older as well. You've only been in this call nine months. You're dependent

on him to argue for paid parental leave when you have children. Plus, he and the congregant golf together.

...

While the details of these stories are drawn from imagination, we all know a story like this that's all too true. Each one contains the same three ingredients:

1. There is someone who has power, and someone who has less power.
2. There is a closed circle of reporting: The only person the victim can report to is in leadership within system the victim is critiquing.
3. The leader wields retaliatory control over the victim, through a reference letter, a recommendation, the ability to find a job, or spiritual authority.

A Closed System

Tell one of these all-too-common stories to a friend who works in a corporate job, and their eyes will likely widen in shock. Corporate life is far from perfect, but at least employees are not expected to file complaints about their boss with ... their boss. A closed system – that's what is in place in so many churches – inhibits reporting. When someone does come forward, reports are kept "in house."

In August, the news broke about the more than 1,000 souls abused by more than 300 priests in Pennsylvania. Though I am not surprised by these reports, I am devastated by them. There is no metric

for the harm that has been caused; we don't know how to measure shame or count tears, weigh debilitation and depression, chart the paths that lives might have taken had they been allowed the kind of childhood all children deserve. The revelations reinforce what commentators have argued for years: The church's instinct is to focus not on protecting victims but preventing scandal and protecting abusive clergy.

“Church is a Corporation”

A colleague of mine, Pastor Lenny Duncan, reminded me recently that “the church is a corporation.” It does what corporations do: avoid humiliation, avoid risk and change, seek to protect itself, seek

Called by the gospel, we must not rely on hoping our leaders will behave well, but assume that at times they will not.

to perpetuate itself. I hope for a church that lifts up the marginalized, that gives power to the powerless, and that, above all, protects the vulnerable among us from harm. But these characteristics, which sit at the heart of the gospel, are often in direct conflict with the impulses of a corporate entity.

My friend's words made me feel a little queasy. I'd like to think of the church as a community – as the body of Christ. Though I do believe the church should seek to pattern itself around this biblical image, we lull ourselves into a false sense of security if we forget our corporate nature. Maybe some part of us believes (despite theologies that would refute this) that our pastors, elders, and bishops are slightly better people than the average human – slightly closer to God. We imagine that clergy could never be powerbrokers or tyrants. We assume the best instead of the worst of our leaders, setting up structures without the checks and balances that would ensure that those in power can't abuse it, and those who are victimized will always be listened to.

If the church wishes to root out abuses, we must go farther than listening circles or liturgies (though these are good and needed) and address the power imbalances baked into our systems. In this moment, we are called to take seriously our fallibility as people and leaders. We are called, also, to squarely face the truth of our institutional nature. Just as we, individually, are both saint and sinner, the church is capable of both immense good and immense harm. To curtail the corporate impulses, we must build in systems that favor the needs of the powerless. Leaders at the top of the hierarchy

who think of themselves as “easy to talk to” must remember that approachability does not correct a power imbalance. It is misguided to imagine that those whose paychecks you sign or whose candidates you oversee will share openly with you.

A Complete Audit

Called by the gospel, we must not rely on hoping our leaders will behave well, but assume that at times they will not. If the church truly wishes to protect its laypeople, staff, clergy, and ministerial candidates from abuse of all kinds we must conduct a full audit of our power systems. Create, for instance, an independent council of diverse experts, in consultation with victims, that investigates past abuses. Such clarity would demonstrate the denomination's dedication to those who have been disenfranchised or exploited by its structures.

I can imagine a denominational ethics office capable of receiving reports of abuse anonymously, tracking and investigating reports, and, when appropriate, communicating with local authorities. Such an office would be staffed with compassionate experts and retain a healthy independence from the denomination it is called to serve. This office would carry out regular boundaries training with denominational bodies, congregations, clergy, and staff.

Any system as we find it is always working for someone. The first question: Who is it working for? The second: How do we make it work for the vul-

The first question to ask of any system is: Who is it working for? The second: How do we make it work for the vulnerable?

nerable? Our reforms must not be based on the opinions of those who hold power, but designed by those who have been victimized.

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Women are living in dangerous times. Thankfully, courageous movements are emerging. Yet it is important to remember that for women of African and Native American descent, the violation of their bodies

began with the founding of this nation, supported by white Christian religion. The problem of sexual violence has a long history in this country.

More insidious, such violence has been justified and supported by patriarchal values. It continues to be. When a woman comes forward with a story of rape or sexual abuse, people immediately ask: What was she doing or wearing to provoke this unfortunate incident? This question harbors the idea that when women's bodies are violated, their lack of modesty must have caused the incident, even if in some small measure. The burden of proof is often on women to demonstrate why they are innocent and beyond moral reproach. In particular, Christian communities find themselves trapped, as they attempt to address problems of sexist abuse through the only value system they've ever known – the very system of patriarchal values that make possible forms of sexual violence.

I have lectured around the nation about problems of racism and hetero-patriarchy within churches and broader society. I have observed that many people hold a basic assumption about why sexual violence occurs. The assumption is that we simply do not know enough about sexual assault. We assume that people make bad choices because they haven't gotten the right individual training or counsel to make informed ethical decisions. We imagine that the primary problem is men who are ignorant of sexist values and how these values tacitly justify violence against women's bodies.

It is assumed that our primary task is to educate a culture of boys and men to reject toxic masculinity and to make these important connections between sexist norms and practices. The emphasis is education. This assumption is not completely mistaken, yet it fails to acknowledge the deeper problem of *patriarchal power and interests*. This assumption either dismisses or ignores how patriarchal norms uphold sexist power structures within churches and society. Similar to racist institutions that allow white communities to maintain white privilege, patriarchal institutions allow cis-gendered men to "cash-in" on their own privilege. For instance, many men remain silent on the gender pay gap because they directly benefit from institutional practices of income inequality. We must be morally honest about how the

maintenance of patriarchal power and interests is at the heart of silence surrounding forms of sexual violence against women. It is often not about education. It's about people's unwillingness to divest of sexist systems that maintain their interests.

What we need is moral courage.

In the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights protests and marches, only a small percentage of black clergy were in solidarity with Martin Luther King Jr. and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The vast majority of white and black clergy thought King's tactics were unwise and dangerous. The quest for racial justice has always relied on a small cadre of people who possessed the moral courage to fight systems of racial discrimination and apartheid. Likewise, what we need is moral courage in this moment where the intensification of patriarchal abuse is occurring in social, political, economic, and ecclesial spaces. We must take risks and speak truth to power about sexual violence. This is not easy. Those who would courageously speak out must count up the costs, as Jesus reminded his disciples when beckoning them to follow him.

In *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance*, historian Danielle McGuire reminds us that Rosa Parks' initial protest actions began not with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 but in the 1940s, when she dangerously helped fashion a movement within black churches that addressed forms of sexual violence that black women endured at the hands of white men in America. Parks' courage compelled the NAACP and other black churches to get involved in making the rape of black women such as Recy Taylor a national discussion. Parks knew that the fight against patriarchy and sexual violence was less about educating white men and more about people having the bravery to confront the gross maintenance of racist and sexist norms that justify acts of violence against black women. Moral courage was the answer.

We are called to embody moral courage as individuals and communities against sexual violence. Will you join this call?

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Women in (Class) Conflict



By Bruce Rogers-Vaughn

Working as a pastoral psychotherapist for three decades, I have listened to the stories of women in pain. Many were victims of workplace harassment, discrimination, sexual abuse, or intimate violence. The #MeToo movement is making my job easier, as the women who talk with me today are becoming more adept at locating the social sources of their distresses, rather than assuming their struggles are rooted in personal inadequacies or the idiosyncrasies of their inner worlds. This is another reminder that liberating social movements can accomplish more widespread healing than even the best psychotherapies.

This does not mean that #MeToo is without ambiguity. Many working-class women, who happen to be disproportionately women of color, have been critical of the class-based and racial insensitivity

Working-class women are typically far more vulnerable to sexual harassment than women in higher-income brackets, such that it's difficult for many to claim their #MeToo moment.

of some Hollywood actresses as they made public remarks following the Harvey Weinstein revelations. The working-women backlash was so forceful that eight female labor activists were invited to the 2018 Golden Globe Awards to walk the red carpet with celebrity sponsors.

Trickle-Down Feminism?

In effect, #MeToo is highlighting the class and race differences that have bedeviled feminist efforts for decades. A failure to recognize how class conflict appears between and against women could easily undermine the radical potential of the #MeToo movement. Without the voices of the working-class women majority, we will be left with yet another version of “trickle-down feminism.”¹

Class is one of the most misunderstood topics in public conversation. We typically hear this word as an indicator of socioeconomic status, cultural taste, or educational achievement. None of these exactly hit the mark. Class is a form of social dominance in which people with economic, political, and cultural power subjugate those who lack such power. The purpose of this is to maintain control and increase wealth for elites.²

Another confusion is the notion that class is entirely distinct from race and gender. This is not the case. Rather, class elites deploy categories of race and gender to achieve their goals. First, they use racism and sexism – which regard people of color and women as somehow inferior – to label and shunt people into lower-paid or even unpaid labor, or otherwise to exclude them from the workforce. This means that a significant portion of racist and sexist practices is class power doing its thing. Second, class elites use their power to divide the working class against itself. White men, for example, are led to believe that immigrants, African Americans, and women are to blame for losses of wages and jobs. Both methods enable class elites to maintain control and shift wealth to themselves.

The truth is that today's working class is disproportionately women, especially women of color.³

These women are typically far more vulnerable to sexual harassment than women in higher-income brackets, to such a degree that many have difficulty claiming their #MeToo moment.⁴ This leads one activist to conclude: “Immigrant issues, gender issues, and antiracism are working-class issues.”⁵

Even if every individual man repented of his sexist ways, we still would have patriarchy. The working-class women who attended the Golden Globes pointed to this fact in their joint statement: “Too much of the recent press attention has been focused on perpetrators and does not adequately address the systemic nature ... of violence against women.”⁶

Even if every individual man repented of his sexist ways, we still would have patriarchy.

The core problem is not individual bad apples, but a system. This patriarchal system is embedded in the fabric of social conventions, laws, institutional regulations, corporate policies, and religious practices.

This is not to equate capitalism and patriarchy. Patriarchal societies and systems flourished prior to capitalism, which did not emerge until the 16th century. Nevertheless, patriarchy – racism too – has been an inherent feature of capitalism from its inception. This continues to be true in capitalism’s present-day forms. I would argue that patriarchy is not rooted in an intrinsic hatred of women but emerges from material interests. Patriarchy is therefore deeply entangled with class conflict.

Class is the way capitalism organizes society, with considerable help from racism and sexism. “Capitalism is an economic system based on the exploitation of the many by the few,” writes Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.⁷ “You can’t have capitalism without racism,” Malcolm X declared.⁸ The Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminist activists, extended this to sexism as well.⁹ Summing up, bell hooks refers to the current world order as a “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”¹⁰

If this is true, we cannot eliminate patriarchy without creating alternatives to how capitalism organizes society. This will not be achieved by the actions of individuals. It takes a system to change a system.

Beyond Identity Politics

The liberation of people identifying as women will not succeed if it is limited to a narrow, individualistic identity politics. Drawing upon the wisdom of the revolutionary Black struggle and anti-capitalist feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, we can find better

STUDY THE MASTERS

By Lucille Clifton

like my aunt timmie.
it was her iron,
or one like hers,
that smoothed the sheets
the master poet slept on.
home or hotel, what matters is
he lay himself down on her handiwork
and dreamed. she dreamed too, words:
some cherokee, some masai and some
huge and particular as hope.
if you had heard her
chanting as she ironed
you would understand form and line
and discipline and order and
america.

ways to resist sexism and racism by understanding how class antagonism is at work in these forms of injustice.¹¹ This will require broad-based coalitions that work across identities. We are already seeing signs of this, not only in #MeToo, but also in #BlackLivesMatter and inclusive labor efforts such as the Fight for \$15 campaign.¹² The healing of individuals requires more than the exertions of lonely individualism. It demands the taming of ruthless structures or systems.

Today's globalized economy values money over people. It is diametrically opposed to the Kingdom of God portrayed by Jesus in the Gospels. We cannot, Jesus insists, serve both God and money. By joining coalitions to liberate the exploited, we will make clear which side we are on.

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Notes

- 1 Sarah Jaffe, "Trickle-Down Feminism," *Dissent* (Winter, 2013).
- 2 See Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, "Class Power and Human Suffering," in *Pastoral Theology and Care: Critical Trajectories in Theory and Practice*, edited by Nancy J. Ramsay (Wiley Blackwell, 2018), pp. 55-77.
- 3 See Victoria Brownworth, "Women Are the Working Class," *Dame*, April 12, 2018.
- 4 Bernice Yeung, *In a Day's Work: The Fight to End Sexual Violence Against America's Most Vulnerable Workers* (New Press, 2018).
- 5 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016), p. 216.
- 6 Leah Fessler, "Read the full statement of the women activists attending the Golden Globes," *Quartz*, Jan. 7, 2018.
- 7 *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Haymarket Books, 2017).
- 8 *Malcolm X Speaks*, edited by George Breitman (Pathfinder, 1989), p. 91.
- 9 Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, p. 205.
- 10 bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (Routledge, 2000), pp. 6, 67, 161.
- 11 In addition to the works by Taylor already cited, see Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (Verso, 2018).
- 12 Tamara Draut, *Sleeping Giant: How the New Working Class Will Transform America* (Doubleday, 2016).

One critic called the list pitiful and patronizing. Another said it reads like a bad comedy skit. A list of "worst explanations" was circulated this year by a British government report – a survey list of the worst reasons given by United Kingdom businesses for not appointing women to their boards.

The responses come from various CEOs or other leaders of corporations of the FTSE (Financial Times Stock Exchange) 350. Making the list of worst reasons:

1. "I don't think women fit comfortably into the board environment."
2. "There aren't that many women with the right credentials and depth of experience to sit on the board – the issues covered are extremely complex."
3. "Most women don't want the hassle or pressure of sitting on a board."
4. "Shareholders just aren't interested in the make-up of the board, so why should we be?"
5. "My other board colleagues wouldn't want to appoint a woman on our board."
6. "All the 'good' women have already been snapped up."
7. "We have one woman already on the board, so we are done – it is someone else's turn."
8. "There aren't any vacancies at the moment – if there were I would think about appointing a woman."
9. "We need to build the pipeline from the bottom – there just aren't enough senior women in this sector."
10. "I can't just appoint a woman because I want to."

"As you read this list of excuses you might think it's 1918, not 2018," said Amanda Mackenzie of Business in the Community, an organization that promotes progressive UK business practices.

"Maybe those that give credence to these excuses are the ones that are not up to sitting on boards and should move over: We are in the 21st century after all. However, we have plenty of reasons to be optimistic. The combination of gender pay gap reporting and the increased focus on equality and diversity in general by responsible businesses means there are more women on boards than ever before. While we still have a long way to go, with the collaboration between government, employers and their employees (both men and women), we could see true equality in our lifetime."

Source: "Revealed: The worst explanations for not appointing women to FTSE company boards," May 31, 2018, gov.uk.



At the Metropolitan Museum, New York, 1988
Photo by Elliott Erwitt
© Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos

How Many Gender Differences Must a Liturgy Know?



By Teresa Berger

I listened to an interview on public radio recently in which a 16-year-old explained, “I am a non-binary, pan-sexual human being. My gender at birth was female. I came out as lesbian in my early teens. I am now edging toward transitioning to being male, but for now, I am not comfortable with the ‘trans’ label.” The concrete problem under discussion in the interview was the issue of checking a gender box for that all-important teenage ritual of getting a driver’s license.

Only two options were available where this 16-year-old lived – the traditional binary of “male” or “female.” New York City, on the other hand, by now has 31 recognized genders. Facebook includes well over 50 gender options. And Christian worship services? How many gender differences must a liturgy know?

Lest you think such markers of difference are irrelevant where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, Galatians 3:27-28 makes clear that issues of naming differences are at least as old as the

What we need is a language beyond the limited and limiting traditional gender binary, as we struggle with how best to name and honor diverse ways of being, and of doing gender in the world.

New Testament. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul reminded a divided community of its baptismal identity, an identity that is supposed to outweigh familiar markers of difference: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Binaries Spoken and Unspoken

Paul’s claim is cited frequently as proof that in the church, social differences – gender differences in-

cluded – should not matter. Yet a closer look reveals a more complicated picture. Gal 3:27-28 names differences according to some basic binaries familiar in Paul’s world: Jew vs. Greek, slave vs. free, man and woman. At the same time, the text leaves other important binaries invisible, such as young and old, and rich and poor. Furthermore, Paul occludes in his list some markers of difference that muddle the binaries he names, for example eunuchs and persons with intersex conditions. All this goes to say that naming differences – even if done in order to subvert them – is never an easy task, because the differences we choose to acknowledge are never innocent. They always highlight (some) and occlude (others).

This brings me back to our own times. Struggles with naming differences, particularly gender differences, continue in Christian communities today. This is true whether you belong to a community that explicitly supports “diversity of genders and gendered experiences,” or to a community dedicated to “calling the church back to men” in response to perceived “feminization,” or to a community suffering from gender fatigue. The terrain of struggle is forever shifting, with worship being a particularly marked site.

Let’s take, for example, the changes in hymns sung in worship. There was an upsurge in hymns after the 1970s that explicitly named women together with men as protagonists of salvation history. The

core image in these hymns remained rooted in a traditional gender binary. A couple of texts by John Bell offer striking examples, such as his “Women and Men as God Intended,” or his “Sisters and Brothers, with one Voice.” These hymns grew out of and lent voice to the struggle for women’s rights both outside and inside the church. I welcomed and sang many of these hymns with abandon. By now, however, some of these women-specific linguistic gains have been overtaken by newer gender-specific concerns. Thus, the addition of “sisters” to the traditional “brothers” has been supplanted, at least in some faith communities, by the search for a language that does not reproduce the traditional male-female binary.

31 Genders

The reason is that that binary excludes, for example, non-binary and gender-queer persons. Ruth Duck’s hymn “Sacred the Body” is an example of language that does not reinforce the traditional gender binary. The hymn text calls for respect for “persons,” “bodies,” and “difference,” without ever locking such

The struggle over gender differences is not so easily settled, in liturgy as in the rest of life.

respect into a binary model of sexual difference. Duck’s text tellingly lacks any specific naming of “male and female” bodies. Maybe there is a lesson in this hymn text: Christian worship may not need to name every specific marker of difference that surfaces in a particular cultural moment. Concretely, with regard to gender differences, we may not need hymns today that sing out loud all 31 recognized genders of the City of New York. What we do need, however, is language beyond the limited and limiting traditional gender binary, as we struggle with how best to name and honor diverse ways of being, and of doing gender in the world.

Maybe the complexity of adequately naming differences is one of the reasons for the popularity of Marty Haugen’s hymn “All Are Welcome.” The inclusivity and elasticity of the “All” allows some communities to envision a rainbow flag while singing, and others to imagine an interracial future for their community of faith. A transgender person, on a spiritual journey, might feel affirmed in this hymn – as might a pregnant woman carrying a child in her womb with severe disabilities whom she seeks to welcome against all medical and societal pressures. Or an undocumented immigrant might be allowed

to feel safe for a moment. Yet unease with a simple “All” remains. The struggle over gender differences is not so easily settled, in liturgy as in the rest of life. How to honor and welcome each other’s differences is a profound challenge, of which the right naming of differences in worship is only one small part.

The Hyper-Marked Moment

I think it is safe to assume that questions of gender will continue to shape Christian worship, even (or especially?) as traditional gender codes crumble at least in some contexts (this is by no means a global phenomenon). In the contemporary culture of the North Atlantic world, gender appears hyper-marked for now, not least in terms of media visibility. Christian communities that gather for worship in this cultural current will feel its impact. In the future, however, it may well be that gender will not be as hyper-marked as it is today. That could actually be welcome news for Christian communities, because it might allow them to rediscover that worship of God can be an invitation to resist the absolutizing of sexed identities, whatever these may be.

And if the use of the voice in praise of God is one of the continuities between this life and life beyond the grave (as at least Tertullian argued in his reflections on the resurrected body¹), then the practice of worship might actually be thinkable beyond gender. For a contemporary culture in which gender is hyper-marked, that might be startling, and maybe even good news indeed.

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Note

- 1 In *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 59-62, Tertullian argues that the mouth of the resurrected body will continue to sing the praise of God while other bodily functions (e.g., eating, and sexual relations) will cease because they have become unnecessary.

TWO POEMS BY LUCILLE CLIFTON

adam thinking

she
stolen from my bone
is it any wonder
i hunger to tunnel back
inside desperate
to reconnect the rib and clay
and to be whole again

some need is in me
struggling to roar through my
mouth into a name
this creation is so fierce
i would rather have been born

• • • • •

eve thinking

it is wild country here
brothers and sisters coupling
claw and wing
groping one another

i wait
while the clay two-foot
rumbles in his chest
searching for language to

call me
but he is slow
tonight as he sleeps
i will whisper into his mouth
our names



Tango dancers, Helsinki, 2001
Photo by Elliott Erwitt
© Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos

Men, We Need to Talk



By Tom Krattenmaker

Straight men, there's an overdue conversation we need to have. It's about women – how we regard them and interact with them, especially around sex. It's about how we navigate the new norms that are rapidly setting in as women courageously expose the abuse they've been enduring and insist on the equality that is rightly theirs.

The way to start this conversation is by listening. With the rise of the #MeToo movement, women's voices are a surging force, so there's no excuse for

You think sexual harassment is a women's issue? Funny how those who dominate the public discourse (men) have managed to erase themselves from this story.

not hearing. When we read their accounts in media and on the Internet, when we talk to the women in our lives – when we listen to them – this is what we can hear them saying: They are sick of women being badgered by men who won't take “no” for an answer, of women being backed into corners where there's no way out, physically or otherwise. They are tired of women being treated as though their bodies and sexuality are not fully theirs but, rather, something to which men have a rightful claim.

Sick of It

They are asking men: How would you like it if your workplace colleagues were more interested in the shape of your body than your ability and ideas? If your boss made it clear your career prospects depended on your giving in to his sexual advances? If you were expected to smile your way through such an ordeal and “take it as a compliment”?

Women are revealing the tactics they've had to develop, like giving out fake phone numbers to

heavy-handed men who won't let up at a bar or a party, like female bystanders overhearing a menacing conversation between hunter and hunted and intervening by giving the target a big hug and pretending to be her friend.

After we have listened to women, what should we be communicating to each other?

Not a litany of complaints. Some men whine that women hate us now. (No, they don't.) Others moan that it's hard to be a man these days. (More complicated than it used to perhaps, but not half as difficult as it is to be a woman.)

Some men complain that women have lost the ability to make men feel special. (No, but more and more men are realizing it's not women's job to make us feel special – unless, of course, we are in a relationship with them, and then it's equally on us to make them feel special too.)

Some lament how tricky things are getting when it comes to attraction and courtship. How do they know when their overtures are OK as opposed to grievous infractions that will incur the wrath of H.R. or the law? (It's not that difficult, men. If there's a woman you like, get to know her as a person and develop a relationship with her. Let sex grow out of closeness and affection, not the other way around.)

Start Talking Sense

Men need to stop griping and start talking sense to one another. We need to be telling each other to ...

- Stop treating women as though they exist to please our eyes and excite our bodies, that sex is the main

reason they were put on this earth. Stop putting them in impossible situations where they're a "slut" if they do and a "bitch" if they don't. Stop treating sex as a form of recreation while leaving women to deal with the profound reproductive consequences.

- Show some class and maturity when women rebuff you. Remind your disconsolate friend that he'll be OK, that he'll meet other women, that "rejection is part of life and you won't actually die when someone you are interested in isn't interested in you," as Daily Kos writer Kelly Macias aptly puts it.¹

- Accept the truth that sex is not the measure of our masculinity. Many of us have grown up and lived under the myth, under the locker-room delusion, that our status as men is equal to the number of notches on our belts. If there must be notches, let's award them not on the basis of how many women we've had sex with, but how many whose equality and humanity we have honored.

- Stop putting the burden on women. We need to make it clear to each other that it's not women's jobs to please us, or police us.

Whose Issue is This?

You think sexual harassment is a women's issue? Funny how those who dominate the public discourse (men) have managed to erase themselves from this story. Who do we think is doing the harassing? Sexual aggression, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual assault – these are men's issues. And it's the

Stop putting women in impossible sexual situations where they're a "slut" if they do and a "bitch" if they don't.

offending men who must change their behaviors. The women with whom we work or study – are their appearance, their clothes, their bodies fair game for our focus and frequent asides and commentaries?

No.

Next time we hear one of our fellow men suggest that sexual harassment is something that women "bring on themselves" – their flirting, their revealing clothes, their cleavage, their whatever – there is a simple response we must give them: No, they don't.

Men, let's help each other expel from our heads the noxious lie that a woman is to blame if a man has sexually harassed or assaulted her. We need to learn that it does not matter what she was wearing. It does not matter how much she drank. Her body, her sexuality, are hers alone.

What men do own is responsibility – extra responsibility that attends to our privileged status. As

writes Sady Doyle, author of *Trainwreck: The Women We Love to Hate, Mock, and Fear ... And Why*, "Men are in a better position than women to call out other abusive men."²

Unto whomsoever much male privilege is given, of him shall be much required. We need to encourage each other to use our privilege to support the

Many of us have grown up and lived under the myth, under the locker-room delusion, that our status as men is equal to the number of notches on our belts.

women who are harassed, pressured, belittled, dehumanized, assaulted – and then are disbelieved when they have the courage to incur further wrath by telling the truth.

You want to know who's a "real man"? We need to teach each other that he's not the one who's good at "getting women." He's the one who treats them as equals. He's the one who stands up for them when their dignity and humanity are under assault.

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Notes

- 1 Kelly Macias, "Allegations against Aziz Ansari allow us to explore the ways women are conditioned not to say no," Daily Kos, Jan. 19, 2018.
- 2 Sady Doyle, "We Need Male Allies, Not Male Heroes," *Elle* magazine, Dec. 6, 2017.

Time's Up for Church Excuses



Traci C. West '81 B.A.

Can we talk honestly about the problem? In a search for the kind of innovative leadership needed to stop sexual abuse, harassment, and assault in our broader US society, the church is the last place that most of us would look. So, can we talk honestly about the deliberate choices Christians have made that help perpetuate our pervasive national problem of sexual violations of women, children, and men?

For centuries now, sexist and homophobic church teachings and practices related to gender and sexuality have nurtured spiritual, emotional, and sexual abuse. Christian pastoral theology's emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation has too often placed more responsibility for transforming the consequences of sexual violence on those who have been

In our religiously plural nation, Christians have a primary moral responsibility to disrupt our ethos of tolerance for sexual violence and abuse.

victimised than on the perpetrators. In recent years public attention to criminal court cases pursued by brave victim-survivors has made clergy sexual abuse an unavoidable scandal for church leaders. Some have expressed increased alarm about the extent of the clergy sexual violence and misconduct against those who trusted them as representatives of God and subsequent church cover-ups, but few of those Christian leaders have offered proactive remedies.

An Individualistic Instinct

When churches directly address other incidents of sexual violence against women and children in their surrounding neighborhoods, the responses tend to default to individualistic mission work fueled by a sincere commitment to Christian outreach that binds up the wounded. Unfortunately, this well-meaning crisis response openly signals that the

church offers no leadership for helping to prevent the assaults before they can occur.

Nevertheless we *must* turn to the church in order to transform definitively our collective cultural tolerance of sexual abuse and violence – regardless of whether we tolerate through tacit indifference or anguished capitulation to the inevitability of the assaults. Christianity wields a bedrock moral influence in this religiously plural nation, which continues to be overwhelmingly dominated by Christian rhetoric, symbols, and traditions. The all-too-rampant sexual violations in the home, workplace, military, prison, college campus dorm, street, church, and elsewhere will never be halted without the church's leadership. For Christians, our capacity for creating change relies on the integrity of our teachings, institutional cultures, and practices – an integrity found in unequivocal, institutionalized expressions of Christian anti-violence values, not merely one-on-one acts of Christian compassion toward certain victim-survivors deemed deserving.

Calling Out Complicity

For some, it may not be immediately apparent that this kind of comprehensive approach requires that we attend to the moral status we give to sexuality, gender, and race. But the starting point for eradicating gender-based crimes of sexual abuse, harassment, and assault should be the disruption of their systemic rootedness in a range of social inequalities related to sexuality and gender. Christian moral prescriptions about sexuality, for instance, would

have to promote gender equality and justice. They would have to oppose those longstanding “power over” traditions in Christianity that assert male and heterosexual superiority. But genuinely promoting

To the demanding task of ending sexual violence, Christians could bring their uniquely politicized spirituality centered on the Jesus movement of the Gospels and Acts.

gender equality and justice requires repudiation of specific forms of Christian complicity that further structural racism through sexual abuse and violence.

Sexual violence was used by white Christian national leaders to subdue the most vulnerable members of populations during centuries of chattel slavery and state-orchestrated theft of Native American lands. Sexual violence constitutes a core element of the racist DNA of our contemporary culture. This historical moral amalgam continues to reinforce our cultural tolerance for sexual violence and abuse, especially against vulnerable and impoverished women and girls of color, including transwomen of color.

Weaponizing Scripture

Responding to questions about the cruelty of his “zero tolerance” federal immigration policies instituted in 2018, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions deployed Christian scripture in a manner reminiscent of the ways in which southern white slaveholders referenced it when asserting state and divine backing of their continued ownership of black slaves.¹ His public reference to Romans 13 to justify the government’s criminalization and caging of desperate, impoverished brown migrants (including young children) helped foster the companionability of government policies, Christian values, and the sexual assault that women have experienced in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.² The appeal to Christian scriptures as a rationale for state policies by the nation’s highest law enforcement official spotlighted the dominant moral influence of Christianity in our religiously plural society.

Deliberately drawing attention to his policy changes in criteria for asylum seekers, Sessions also intervened in a 2018 asylum case involving domestic violence experienced by an El Salvadoran woman. He implemented a policy in which domestic violence and gang violence (that often involves rape) will now be considered “private violence” and ineli-

gible as criteria for asylum.³ Again, state policies of indifference to gender-based violence that victimize impoverished brown migrant women and show contempt for their pleas for protection are telling. They showcase the mutually supportive relationship between anti-brown racism and intimate violence, as well as the role of Christianity, in normalizing this harmful expression of state morality as a routine, acceptable practice.

Christian cultural support for tolerating sexual abuse within the church and the broader society feeds on hypocrisy and denial, which is reflected in the dissonance between rhetoric and practices. If we imbue moral rhetoric with trustworthiness instead of monitoring the morality of practices and their harmful consequences for the most vulnerable, it can mask our shared Christian complicity in the logics of rape culture and white racism. Most costly for the victim-survivors, this kind of hypocrisy and denial often mirrors the perpetrator’s own logic and practices.

Imagining Liberation

Christian love rhetoric proclaiming love as the most authentic representation of Christianity unfortunately exemplifies one of the most potent forms of such hypocrisy and denial. We know that a father who molests his young daughter often tells her and others who know them that he loves her. The male youth pastor who sexually assaults the girl in his youth group may emphatically assert how much he loves all the kids in his youth group. The Christian parent who, in the name of her Christian beliefs, throws her gender-nonconforming or queer child out of the house – sometimes directly into the hands of

Christian liberationist traditions provide an inexhaustible impetus for persevering against sexual violence.

domestic sex traffickers and sexual predators – has probably at some point told the child and others that she loves her child. Christian love rhetoric and other claims about Christian virtues that we announce, preach, pray, and sing can hide our refusal to choose actual practices – intimate, political, and cultural – that are necessary to halt sexual violence and abuse.

Christians possess unique resources to counter the violence. Gospel stories focusing on bodily wholeness and worth, including those of impoverished and vulnerable community members, can nurture moral imaginations committed to seemingly unrealistic justice aims. To the demanding

task of ending sexual violence by challenging the politically enforced racial/ethnic and sex/gender hierarchies that perpetuate it, Christians could bring their uniquely politicized spirituality that is centered on the Jesus movement of the Gospels and Acts. Christian liberationist traditions provide an inexhaustible impetus for persevering against sexual violence by acting in accord with the prophesy of the unwed, pregnant, prophet Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus who declared that God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. In our religiously plural United States, Christians bear primary moral responsibility for maintaining our ethos of tolerance for sexual violence and abuse and therefore have primary responsibility for disrupting it.

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Notes

- 1 See Sylvester Johnson, "The Bible, Slavery, and the Problem of Authority" in Bernadette Brooten, ed., *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 231-248.
- 2 Emily Kassie, "Sexual Assault Inside ICE Detention: 2 Survivors Tell their Stories," *New York Times*, July 18, 2018, A1.
- 3 Katie Benner and Caitlin Dickerson, "Sessions Says Domestic Violence and Gang Violence Are Not Grounds for Asylum," *New York Times*, June 11, 2018, A1.

THE CREATION STORY

By Joy Harjo

I'm not afraid of love
or its consequence of light.

It's not easy to say this
or anything when my entrails
dangle between paradise
and fear.

I am ashamed
I never had the words
to carry a friend from her death
to the stars
correctly.

Or the words to keep
my people safe
from drought
or gunshot.

The stars who were created by words
are circling over this house
formed of calcium, of blood

this house
in danger of being torn apart
by stones of fear.

If these words can do anything
if these songs can do anything
I say bless this house
with stars.

Transfix us with love.



Silver City, Virginia, 1995
Photo by Eli Reed
© Eli Reed/Magnum Photos

Moment of Truth At the Border



By Enedina Vasquez

When I was nine years old, I did not know I was created by God in his own image. I felt that God was something very powerful, good, and fearful, and fearing God meant I was supposed to be a good girl and God would let me enter heaven when I died. But I was a foolish girl. I thought the adults knew everything and I had to listen and learn from them. What I didn't know was that we grow up and become the sum of our experiences and discover life and God on our own.

I was nine when I lost my voice and my confidence. Those days, I would walk to church and school with my school friend Tony. We would sit together in church every week. One Sunday Tony was not there at our regular spot in the pew. When the Mass began, I smelled the incense and turned to see our

I was nine when I lost my voice and my confidence in myself. It has taken a lifetime to know that I am made in the image of God.

priest processing down the aisle in glittering gold and white robes, and right behind him was Tony, carrying the cross and smiling for all to see.

I watched Tony ring the bells and put the oil and water on the altar. I was moved so much that I too wanted to do that – to be up there helping the priest and God on Sunday morning. After the service I ran over to Sister Cabrini and said I wanted to be like Tony, I wanted to help the priest hand out the Body of Christ. She told me that I could not do that because I was a girl. At that moment (and long after) I was “less than” – less of a human being, less of a child of God. From that day on I felt my prayers were not good enough.

It has taken a lifetime to know that I am made in the image of God, that I can serve God, and God is alive in my world today. God is merciful, forgiving,

and full of love for us. I am in awe of him, and I see him in the most unusual places, like little sparks of light, nuances that quietly scream, “I am here, see me.”

A Tap on the Window

Many years ago, after traveling in Mexico, I was on the International Bridge, in my car, returning to the US. I had just paid the toll, sweating, waiting in a long line of vehicles when this little girl taps on my window. She was tiny, and her eyes were red from the sting of the sweat draining down her brow. She showed me some rosaries she was selling. I looked at her and I saw God looking back at me, with little fingers grasping the dollar I offered.

I asked her why she was here in the hot sun. Where is your mother or father? She said, my father is over there. She pointed behind her. I turned – and saw God there in the hot sun, a young father entertaining people for donations, earning a living together with his little girl. I later wrote a poem about it, which says in part:

“Compreme un Rosario, Senora,”

She says in a voice that sounds like an apology.
I look into her eyes and Christ looks back
Wondering why He is crucified daily
In this girl's eyes
By the indifference of people passing by.
I see the blood of Christ
In her dirty fingernails

As they help her hands grab
At the dollar I give her.
And I am just passing through.
I'm just passing through.

I felt so helpless, so sad, and then the car behind me honked and the officials were waving me to move up. So I left God there in the blazing heat, and I have carried the memory of that day ever since: The poor, the hungry, men, women, children, the marginalized are for me the image of God asking me to help, to pray and see them, to really see and feel them in my heart because I cannot help everyone, but I can pray and reach out and notice them and see God looking back at me.

Lesser Altars

Today I see God also in the face of sunflowers growing in vibrant fields. In the clouds God rains down on all of us. In the mountains he stores his treasures. Yet we hurt God daily. We destroy trees, fields, rivers, oceans, and we maul our landscape until it bleeds. We have come to worship other gods that make us rich, powerful, and unkind. Our children demand only material goods, and those who cannot afford such goods are seen as “less than,” so that

Men held the agenda, wrote the history of religions, and designed church to fit those agendas. Now it is up to the women to say: We know better and we can do better.

children become angry and hurtful and move far away from God. We are a busy people and become blind to God, and our churches are empty because we forget what was handed down to us in community, family, and worship.

I grew up with a mother who was there for me and my siblings. She was the warmth of the home, she was the one who wiped our tears and who scolded us when we acted up or sinned. On Sundays after church she would serve us hot bone soup, “caldo de rez,” with a steaming heap of the warmest tortillas gently and lovingly covered in hot melting butter. We all ate together, the extended family of abuelos, abuelas, tios and tias and cousins all at the same table. God was there eating with us, in the faces of the old as they shared stories that were meant to be life lessons for us kids. Now our minds go elsewhere, to other altars that reduce God to a slogan or cartoon. Yet God, the image of God, is there beaming for us, looking at us, waiting for us.

I often find myself wishing I could speak to all young women today. I want to say to them that if they love God and want to be of service in their church, any church, they should do it. Go to seminary, learn theology and church history, and keep working to change the paradigms that persist against women clergy. In former days, men wrote the history of religions and designed church to fit their agendas. It is up to the women to say: We know better and we can do better. Women have emerged out of the darkness. We are the future of the church. We will nurture new generations of worshipers, believers, and doers. The image of God enfolds us and sets us free. All of us.

Born in San Antonio, Enedina Vasquez is a visual artist, writer, and the co-founder of the ecumenical ministry Platicas, which gathers Latina women for prayer and communion meeting at two San Antonio Lutheran churches. A graduate of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, she is now Vicar of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in San Antonio.

LITTLE PRAYER

By Danez Smith

let ruin end here

let him find honey
where there was once a slaughter

let him enter the lion's cage
& find a field of lilacs

let this be the healing
& if not let it be

The Role of Pastors: The Vital Link in Stopping Domestic Violence



By Ally Kern

Domestic violence is one of the most prolific forms of injustice within the US – and the Christian church – affecting at least one in three women in their lifetime.¹ Relationship violence is a deeply embedded, often hidden, and yet profoundly traumatic communal reality. Considering that the Christian church remains the largest institution in the US – and represents the increasing socioeconomic and ethnic diversity of the nation – it is imperative to address the role of the local church in survivor support, counsel, and healing.²

Christian survivors most often reveal their experience of abuse first – *and often only* – to their pastor. This puts pastors in the place of a first responder. Yet many have never been trained to understand how to shape their pastoral care to respond effectively. Church leaders and faith communities can – and must – learn to think creatively and implement practices to help make the church a safe place for women who experience domestic abuse.

Steady Commitment

It is important, first of all, that churches make an unwavering commitment to stand against all forms of abuse, and undertake clear steps to prevent domestic violence within their own faith community.

Christian survivors most often reveal their experience of abuse first to their pastor. This puts pastors in the place of a first responder. But are they trained to respond?

Adopting a mandate or charter that condemns relational abuse makes a public statement that the church will not tolerate this behavior. Hosting community conferences or inviting a local expert to teach a staff-mandatory class on intimate partner violence is essential.³ Additional skill-building opportunities include Sunday school classes, youth

and young adult courses that focus on the signs of relationship abuse and healthy relationship skills, and pre-marital and marital pastoral counseling that incorporate material on intimate partner violence.

Churches can feature relevant books and online resources, make sure preaching and Sunday prayers give prominence to the theme, and create a pastoral/lay care team equipped to support survivors. Training, talks, survivor testimonies, and other events in October – Domestic Violence Awareness Month – can make a strong impact. Such actions could break the silence of domestic violence, as well as prevent assaults themselves.

Trying to Cope

Despite our best efforts, the sad truth is that relationship abuse continues to occur. In the midst of a crisis, it can be overwhelming for a pastor or lay leader to know how to help. The trauma of domestic abuse exceeds a survivor's ability to cope given the high level of anxiety, stress, and possibly fear. She may feel out of control, be flooded emotionally, and present as confused, helpless, and even incoherent. It is vital to have specific guidelines in place if abuse occurs, since pastoral caregivers can easily be uncertain about how to respond.⁴

The initial step to take in a crisis is establish relations with the woman who is disclosing abuse, listen to her with respect and empathy, believe her experience as valid and real, and assure her it is not

her fault.⁵ As a pastor or lay leader it is important also to acknowledge if you are a mandated reporter required to tell authorities about disclosed abuse, as well as admit your limitations in how you can help. With the latter in mind, a ready list of referrals to domestic violence shelters, abuse-trained therapists, and other emergency health contacts is indispensable.⁶ Establish whether there are children involved and if there is immediate danger.⁷ Safety is absolutely the chief concern in abuse situations, so be cognizant that any intervention can heighten

Domestic violence is a multifaceted experience that many women in the church will suffer. The trauma impact on survivors often persists long after the abusive relationship ends.

the risk to the survivor and her children. If the survivor feels she is in danger, consult your referral list for options such as police, an emergency room, local shelters, or possibly trained church members who can hide her until longer-term solutions can be found.⁸

In the Face of Violence

In the course of all these steps – listening with empathy, assessing for safety and plausible interventions – a crucial guiding principle is to honor the expressed needs and wants of the survivor as well as her permission to take any further action.⁹ Keeping in mind the likelihood of further violence or even death when a woman stands up for herself against an abuser, we must proceed cautiously and with the assurance of confidentiality.

Finally, ask for the woman's permission to record notes on your meeting, which may be of great assistance to her at a later date with any legal procedures she may need to go through. Though it is up to the survivor to decide when and how to pursue her path to safety, freedom, and healing, ultimately the church that provides compassionate, insightful support in a crisis will establish itself as a safe place for assistance and recovery.

The road to healing and transformation after the experience of domestic violence can be long and complex. Beyond these outlined measures, churches can make a significant difference by devoting and raising funds to assist survivors, provide a trauma-trained counselor or pastoral caregiver to organize a listening support group, furnish housing, food, and childcare, or connect her with legal and public services. Because a lack of finances is the most substantial barrier to leaving an abusive

relationship, churches that agree to pool funds for the benefit of survivors can improve their prospects for the future.¹⁰

An essential task for pastors and lay leaders is to empower and equip survivors to understand that God abhors the abuse of women and fully supports them taking action to separate from or divorce an abusive partner for their safety and healing.¹¹ Facing significant spiritual suffering, many faithful survivors will undoubtedly wrestle with deep theological questions. In such cases, congregational leaders should proceed with compassionate listening and refrain from providing quick answers and prayers that may silence the survivors' voice.¹²

God's Word for Abused Women

To privilege the viewpoints of survivors is to respect the dangers and complexities of venturing into deep theological waters. Exploring the Bible with survivors to uncover God's word for abused women – rather than giving blanket answers – can powerfully nurture survivors' liberty in their spiritual recovery. When an appropriate time to enter into such theological discussions and spiritual practices has been mutually discerned by a pastoral caregiver and survivor together, it is helpful to refer to established Christian contemplative practices of healing

Exploring the Bible with survivors to uncover God's word for abused women – rather than giving blanket answers – can powerfully nurture survivors in their spiritual recovery.

that are also widely regarded by research evidence as means of healing.¹³

It is important to take action to hold abusers in the church accountable, and to align responsibility for the abuse solely with the perpetrator.¹⁴ Any action towards the abuser must prioritize the woman's safety and be made with her permission. Whatever steps are taken in the pursuit of recovery, remember that empowering a survivor requires time, patience, compassion, and a diversity of means, but such an investment is a tangible illustration of God's special love that is urgently required from the church today.¹⁵

Domestic violence is a multifaceted experience that many women in the church will suffer, and as such, it is crucial that pastoral caregivers understand the effects of abuse. The trauma impact on survivors often persists long after the abusive relationship ends, and the complexities of the resulting and enduring health risks present challenges on many

fronts. In the larger sociocultural sphere, pastoral caregiving involves resisting forces that contribute to oppressing women and confronting the patriarchal theology and practices of the church. In urgent and specific ways, pastoral caregiving also involves the local congregation working to prevent abuse, support in crisis situations, and nurture recovery.

Ally Kern is a survivor of domestic abuse who uses her voice to empower the church to stop domestic violence. She is a Ph.D. candidate in practical theology at Claremont School of Theology and adjunct professor of practical theology at Azusa Pacific University. She travels widely as a speaker and trainer at churches, non-profits, universities, and small groups on topics ranging from intimate partner violence to spiritual practices of healing to social justice issues. See www.allykern.com.

Notes

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- 3 Al Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Fortress, 2000), pp. 15-20; Judith McFarlane and Ann Malecha, “Sexual Assault Among Intimates: Frequency, Consequences, and Treatments” (National Institute of Justice).
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- 9 Doehring, pp. 176-178.
- 10 Miles, p. 83.
- 11 Kroeger and Nason-Clark, pp. 174-185.
- 12 Patton, p. 31.
- 13 For specific Christian practices, including breathing and meditation practices, listening, and inner healing prayer, please see Alane Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: A Journey of Transformation through the Science of Embodiment* (Balboa Press, 2014) and Ally Kern, “Reconsolidating Trauma Memories through Contemplative Practice: Inner Healing Prayer for Christian Women Survivors of Domestic Violence,” available at www.allykern.com.
- 14 Miles, p. 185; Kroeger and Nason-Clark, p. 65.
- 15 Doehring, pp. 147-148.

EXPLOITATION, SEXPLOITATION, AND CONSUMER SOCIETY

It’s a crime against humanity and ultimately a sin: Some 20-30 million people – including five million children – are trapped in modern slavery, whether forced by traffickers into labor or exploited in commercial sex enterprises, says a United Church of Christ report at ucc.org.

More than 75 percent of human trafficking is forced labor (child labor, debt bondage among migrant laborers, involuntary domestic servitude, child soldiers). Nearly 25 percent of human trafficking is forced prostitution, according to the International Labor Organization.

“In America, 60,000 men, women, and children are enslaved at this very moment,” the Interfaith Toolkit on Human Trafficking declares. “Human trafficking is the second largest and fastest-growing organized crime in the world.” Profits from sex slavery are estimated to be nearly \$10 billion.

Children and youth are especially vulnerable. “Unsheltered youth are more likely to fall victim to sexual exploitation,” the toolkit says. About 1.7 million US youth experience homelessness each year. The toolkit cites these statistics: 28 percent of youth living on the street trade sex for basic needs, such as food or shelter, a practice known as survival sex. Nearly 40 percent of all American homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA, yet only 7 percent of the US youth population is LGBTQIA.

“The violence done to the physical, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing of children and women who are forced into prostitution, the pornography industry, sex tourism and other forms of sexploitation are violations of the call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves,” declares the human trafficking webpage at ucc.org. “The influx of immigrants crossing the border into America are most susceptible to modern slavery, as traffickers use their vulnerability as immigrants as tools to manipulate and coerce.”

Modern consumerism drives much of the exploitation. “Our demand for more products and low prices comes at a high price – that of the slave labor of men, women, and children around the globe,” the toolkit says. “As Americans, we must ask ourselves: ‘Do we really care under what conditions our products are made?’”

Human Trafficking Awareness Month is January. Available at ucc.org, the toolkit offers churches ways to fight sex slavery and inhuman labor practices. The toolkit was produced by the Washington Inter-Religious Staff Community Working Group on Human Trafficking.

– Ray Waddle

Source: www.ucc.org/justice_womens-issues_human-trafficking



Bratsk, Siberia, 1967
Photo by Elliott Erwitt
© Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos



Life made me a feminist before I knew the meaning of the word. I didn't have to be convinced that the world was hostile to women, girls, and vulnerable boys and men (though grad school helped me clarify some of that). I was raised by a single mom who fled a suburban home and "security" with an abusive husband in Texas for a safer, albeit impoverished, life with me and my sister in rural Arkansas.

Following our move in 1972, I became friends with a neighbor boy my age. We spent long, unsupervised summer days exploring an abandoned lumber mill and conversing uncomfortably about the exilic chaos from which our mothers had rescued us. Our bond grew around shared secrets of raging domestic violence and a trauma-induced fear of dominant men. Our liberations were different, though: my mom left Texas, his mother ended up taking his father's life to save her own.

Later that year, mom moved us into red-brick government housing and made friends with two other women who shared her plight of frantic flights to protect children from male wrath, addiction, and stupidity. They would gather to the song-stylings of Charlie Rich on 8-track tape and chain smoke, laugh, and curse – comparing disappointments, desires, and declarations about the plummeting value of the men in their lives. Without fail, someone would see me in the room and say, "except for David." These picaresque living saints renamed the world for me, giving me a new script, a seed of hope that maybe something like *exceptional manhood* was possible.

Along the way, I found an unlikely script doctor, former NFL lineman Joe Ehrmann, the subject of the prize-winning book *Season of Life* by Jeffrey Marx. Ehrmann champions a thoughtful and simple strategy for how the lives of boys and men might be re-written in ways that set atremble popular myths of manhood.

In his 2013 TEDx talk in Baltimore, Ehrmann identifies three cultural lies of toxic masculinity that shape young men from elementary school through the marketing machinery of consumer adulthood: the myths of ballfields (athletic prowess), bedrooms ("sexual conquest"), and billfolds (financial success). When someone says "be a man," they are appealing to these myths and the distorted emotional landscape and violence they create. Ehrmann counters with two new codes to guide male life, indeed, all human life: the emotional depth and respect found in quality *relationships* and a *cause* bigger than oneself, one that better the world by

helping others. Respectful relationships in service to a helping cause becomes the template for teaching boys how to be men, refiguring masculinity in the process. Borrowing from Bonhoeffer, Ehrmann calls for a seismic change in our culture, one that forms boys into "men built for others." ***

I have spent most of the last 25 years helping my wife prepare two daughters to be strong and brave in a hostile world. I have taken the position that men need to step back and make room for women's gifts and strengths, voices and agency. But as I consider my time as a Christian educator (confirmation classes, Bible studies, sermons, curriculum choices), I think I might have served many women better by spending less time "getting out of the way" and more time teaching new scripts to the boys-becoming-men. It feels like an abdication that I delayed passing along clear yet pliable myths that young men might live into – character ideals that might mitigate (not multiply) the rampages of modern constructed masculinity.

There is a risk and peril, of course, in creating new honor codes. Perhaps even our best paradigms and storylines privilege *and* suppress. The complications and complexities of race, class, and gender will always call for deeper analysis, resistance, and a stubborn metaphorical "yes, but not quite" approach, to quote theologian Edward Farley. But what am I waiting for? Here I think Ehrmann's approach can be a pragmatic endeavor, pointing to a masculinity that moves by improvisational bravery and competence, adjusting to on-the-ground needs for love, respect, and advocacy.

So maybe today I'll risk teaching a new script to young men, one where "manning up" reclaims something like Aristotle's virtue of courage, a discerning balance between fear and confidence. Such manly courage would include acts of relinquishing power, but also the unapologetic exertion of strength to defend anyone on the receiving end of power's unholy play. A generation of boys/men who will name the lies of masculinity, form honest relationships, and defend the bodily integrity of women, men, girls, and so-called "weaker" boys needn't be mythological heroes or static ideals of courage for all time. They could be exceptional men. We might even call them the sons of the daughters of God.

*** See Joe Ehrmann, *InSideOut Coaching: How Sports Can Transform Lives* (Simon and Schuster, 2011).

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Sending the Four Horsemen Away



By Allyson McKinney Timm '17 M.Div.

Profound, enduring concerns about violent injustice against women and girls, coupled with an expectant hope that Christian faith might have some salutary response to this longstanding scourge, propelled me to divinity school. It proved a difficult mission.

The first semester at YDS was the hardest. In my Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Care course, we read Christie Cozad Neuger's *Counseling Women* and examined four destructive forces that confront women in particular – sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, rape, and depression. None of them were perfect strangers, I realized.

I had witnessed – in my vocation as a human rights lawyer, in the lives of people I loved, and in the course of my own personal journey – how these four horsemen menaced and ravaged.

An Unwelcome Cohort

For the most part, they trampled only the edges of the largely idyllic garden of my privileged life. They startled and threatened, without overtaking. Only the last one – depression – lingered on, a grim reminder of his unwelcome cohort.

But, before divinity school, I had scarcely breathed a personal word about any of them. And never do I recall hearing them named in church.

In several decades of adult life in the Christian faith, exploring and relishing the diversity of Protestantism, I had perceived an unspoken divide between the world of Christian practice and the world of concern for women's rights and well-being. Both were vital to nourishing my soul and healing my wounds, but rarely did I find them in the same place.

This divide was – and still is, I believe – starkest around sexuality, sexual ethics, and gendered power dynamics. The place to talk about these fraught issues, I found, was among trusted women friends, preferably far from church.

If God is fully captured by the overpowering label “Father,” how could a sensitive girl or a wounded woman approach this male authority figure, or the authoritative men who represented him, and share experiences of profound vulnerability, such as sexual abuse or exploitation?

This masculine side of divine personality could, at times, be a comfort. As a young lawyer, I found great reassurance in the mighty and powerful God

We should ask ourselves why the church has been so long alienated from the broader liberation movements that champion women's dignity and rights.

of Justice, whose righteous anger, the Psalmist tells us, vanquishes the oppressor and breaks the teeth of the wicked and the unjust. This God was clearly outraged by human trafficking and sex slavery in faraway places. And churches said so. He remained the defender of the widow and the orphan.

But rarely if ever did I hear this mighty Father God condemn everyday sexism and sexual harassment closer to home, the widespread rape of American college students, the daily murder of women by their partners. If these gendered harms were part of the same violent quest for dominance as sex trafficking, one would not have known it by the way we Christians prayed.

Divinity school, I'm grateful to say, offered new ways to contemplate the Holy One and bridge my cherished worlds – the world of the woman and



Aretha Franklin, Paris, 1968
Photo by Raymond Depardon
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the widow, with which I identified profoundly, and the sacred world of worship and prayer, which had been my salve against the wounds of the first, even as they appeared walled off and separate.

I discovered new intellectual and spiritual teachers – most strikingly Margaret Farley, ethics professor at YDS, and Marie Fortune, founder of FaithTrust Institute – who had done the rigorous, painstaking work of explaining how the church had fallen short in its treatment of sexuality and of sexual violence. These courageous and brilliant women have gifted the church with guidance on how to minister to these weighty aspects of human experience.

Without Flinching

In time I discovered communities where women could gather and speak openly about our experiences, whether routine discrimination in the ministry profession or the struggle to overcome sexual trauma. I even witnessed, at one stirring public event, another student rising calmly, head held high, eyes straight ahead, to explain without flinching that she had survived being raped by her partner, and that this informed her convictions about the value of women's rights.

"What power is this," I asked myself, "that this sister can speak so calmly yet fiercely, and without a hint of shame – speak of these awful things, and not die?"

I came to consider that the Holy One, in whose image each of us is made, must be as much feminine as masculine, as black as white, as alien to Americans as we are to others. When I fathomed that personally bearing God's image implies that She encompasses my own, this simple turn of logic began a profound theological shift. A God I could identify with my female form and person was one I could better trust with tearful prayers about the pains of womanhood. This understanding of Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer changed everything for me.

Looking back on difficult younger days when I saw the four horsemen threatening, I think now about what I would have asked from my communities of faith, if I could have. If congregations had openly condemned sexual violence, I might have understood – through a sermon, a class, or a spiritual mentor – that I was not to blame and I was not alone. I might have summoned the courage to bring my deepest hurts before my greatest source of strength and solace. Perhaps I could have believed that the God of Justice who vanquished oppressors was pained by the violence visited on me, too. Yet I never heard a sermon about it. Amazingly, to this

day, the lone sermon I have ever known to shine a spotlight on sexual or domestic violence – and to name these harms as sin – was the one Marie Fortune preached in Marquand Chapel at YDS at the invitation of the YDS Women's Center in 2014.

Beyond condemning obvious harms like rape, abuse, and exploitation, I would have asked – and I ask now – that our churches acknowledge the profound injustice and violence that women continue to face, ills sustained by the subordinate status that women are assigned in economic, social, and political life. Even now our US justice system fails to recognize that women have equal human dignity entitling us to equal human rights.

Time for Détente

I ask that we reckon with how our faith traditions have contributed, through silence if not complicity, to injustice and violence against women, and against all who do not easily fit into prescribed gender archetypes. We should all ask ourselves why the church has been so long alienated from the broader liberation movements that champion women's dignity and rights. A détente is desperately needed.

Our churches, let's remember, bring a unique message to the conversation: An understanding of a good God at work in a broken world, of a line between good and evil running through every human heart, and of the promise of redemption despite even the most reprehensible of our misdeeds. All are messages that the world yearns to hear.

This is asking a great deal, to be sure. It will necessitate studying the leaders, both Christian and secular, who have confronted violence against women for decades. Probing connections between sexual violence and wider concerns about women's rights, racial oppression, and LGBTQIA animus is vital.

The four horsemen are still circling – around our churches, homes, workplaces, and seats of government power. They threaten and scheme to trample the peaceful gardens of social, family, and public life that we have so carefully tended. But with each word we speak, each sermon we preach, each time we name rape as a sin against God and her children, each time we take on the sacred responsibility to demand justice or provide care for survivors, these ominous horsemen cower and shrink a little further.

Based in Washington, DC, Allyson McKinney Timm '17 M.Div. is founder and director of Justice Revival, which provides churches with education programs that explore the urgency of human rights and its importance to a Christian understanding of justice. She is a Presbyterian elder with more than a decade's experience as a lawyer in international human rights and gender-based injustice.

CREDITS

Reflections Fall 2018 **Yale Divinity School**

COVER ARTWORK

Adam and Eve, 2006 (acrylic on masonite) © Patricia Brintle / Private Collection / Bridgeman Images

POETRY

Lucille Clifton (1936-2010) was an award-winning poet and woman of letters. *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010* (BOA Editions, 2012), edited by Kevin Young and Michael Glaser, includes all 11 of her published collections and more than 60 other poems.

Lucille Clifton, “adam thinking,” “eve thinking,” and “study the masters” from *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton*. Copyright © 1991, 2000 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of BOA Editions Ltd., www.boaeditors.org.

Stephen Dunn is the author of more than 15 books, including *Whereas* (Norton, 2016), *Lines of Defense* (Norton, 2014), *Loosestrife* (Norton, 1996), and *Different Hours* (Norton, 2000), which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

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Joy Harjo, an internationally known performer and writer of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation, is author of 10 books of poetry, including *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (Norton, 2015), and the memoir *Crazy Brave* (Norton, 2013).

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Danez Smith is the author of *[insert] boy* (YesYes Books, 2014), which won the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the Lambda Literary Award. His latest poetry collection is *Don't Call Us Dead* (Graywolf, 2017).

Danez Smith, “little prayer” from *Don't Call Us Dead*. Copyright © 2017 by Danez Smith. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, MN, www.graywolfpress.org.

Sophia Stid has received fellowships and residencies from the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets, the Lannan Foundation, Vanderbilt University, and Signal Fire Arts. She is the winner of the 2017 Francine Ringold Award for New Writers.

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Convocation and Reunions • Yale Divinity School

October 17-19, 2018



Highlights include:

Beecher Lectures – Oct. 17-19

Charles L. Campbell '82 S.T.M., Professor of Homiletics at Duke Divinity School
"The Scandal of the Gospel: Preaching and the Grotesque"

Lecture I – Wednesday, Oct. 17, 4 p.m.

Lecture II – Thursday, Oct. 18, 10:30 a.m.

Lecture III – Friday, Oct. 19, 10:30 a.m.

Faculty & Alumni Presentations –
Oct. 17 – 10 a.m.

Barbara Brown Taylor '76 M.Div.
"How Religion 101 Saved My Ministry"

Oct. 18 – 8:30 a.m.

Harold W. Attridge
Sterling Professor of Divinity
"The Function of the Unknown in The Gospel of John"

Oct. 19 – 8:30 a.m.

Joel S. Baden '99 B.A.
Professor of Hebrew Bible
"Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby Lobby"
– a discussion of themes from *Bible Nation*, an account of vast private fortune used to promote personal faith in the public sphere

Selected events will be taped and available, both live and afterward, on YDS's Livestream and YouTube pages

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From the Editor: Reckonings

By Ray Waddle



The issue of gender is at the center of identity for nearly everybody, but does it have to be at the center of Christian identity too? Theologian Linn Tonstad of YDS ponders the question (see her remarks on p. 33), and I've been wondering about it ever since we talked several weeks ago. What would the world look like if other themes were more central to Christian definition – Golden Rule, Eucharist, the image of God, hospitality, the alleviation of poverty?

In February, the United Methodists will spend nearly \$4 million to hold a special General Conference assembly that tries to keep the church united despite its differences around homosexuality. That will be a historic meeting, and I hope they find a breakthrough to peaceful coexistence. This is money that might have gone to seminary scholarships or hurricane relief. Instead, theirs is the latest travail in the protracted, exhausting struggle inside various denominations that have chosen to battle over LGBTQIA status, women's ordination, or other matters of sex, gender, and power.

A friend of mine put it brutally. She said her denomination has been fighting over sexuality issues for so long that conflict has become a default style of being together. It depletes all talk of mission outreach or global message. Doctrinal disagreement over sex might make everybody miserable, she said, yet even that is easier than – maybe secretly preferable to – heeding the Sermon on the Mount and doing kingdom work ... together.

Church arguments over sex and gender are framed as debates about biblical authority, the effort to be true to scripture. Maybe there's another reason too: a defense of a sexually dominant hierarchy, male "ownership" of women, the demotion or invisibility of the non-male world, the dismissal of others who don't fit the script.

Writer Robert Jensen argues that nothing is more difficult to imagine than a world after patriarchy. But as a feminist he is dedicated to rejecting any system of domination that passes itself off as inevitable.

"We can commit to resisting any ideology that reduces any human being to the status of an object or refuses to respect the integrity of the human body as part of a larger living world," he writes in *The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men* (Spinifex Press, 2017).

#MeToo looks like a turning point. In a recent report, the United Methodists' General Commis-

sion on the Status and Role of Women says #MeToo marks the end of a period that started nearly 30 years ago, when Anita Hill testified in Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court in 1991. Over that time, famous men were accused of sexual misconduct, but with few repercussions. For a year now, #MeToo has proved different. "Perhaps for the first time," says the report, "the victims were widely believed *and* the offender experienced consequences." The turmoil around the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, still unresolved when *Reflections* went to press, intensifies the climate and the stakes.

If the new era is going to have momentum, persistent cultural contradictions will have to be rooted out and demystified. Consider the thorny question of consent. No should mean no. But a lot of men hear no and take it as a challenge to persuade otherwise, because patriarchal expectations of masculinity say so.

Another pressure point: Standards of beauty and fashion, driven by market values of money and allure, continue to exact a human toll, especially on women and girls, despite the cultural and spiritual gains that women and girls have made.

"We are raising a generation of girls who may look exceptional on paper but are often anxious and overwhelmed – who feel that no matter how hard they try, they will never be smart enough, successful enough, pretty enough, thin enough, well liked enough, witty enough online, or sexy enough," writes Rachel Simmons in *Enough As She Is: How to Help Girls Move Beyond Impossible Standards of Success to Live Healthy, Happy, and Fulfilling Lives* (Harper, 2018).

And there's the issue of pornography. By now porn has gone mainstream, a part of the libertarian drift of the nation. But it's a cruel joke, a warped mirror of the times. To cite Robert Jensen again, porn leaves men with a degraded view of sex and a demeaned view of women. It sexualizes inequality, enacting patriarchy's domination/subordination pathology.

"At its core, that's what pornography does: It makes inequality sexually arousing," he says in *The End of Patriarchy*. "Pornography fuses male dominance with men's sexual pleasure. ... Pornography turns women into objectified bodies for men's sexual pleasure, alienating men from women and men from themselves."

In the world of Christian ethics (and everywhere else), sex is a storm force, potentially sacramental, potentially corruptible, potentially a surrender to intimacy, vulnerability, beauty, commitment, a force illuminated by the divine power that created it.

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