

Questions from the Margins on Christianity and Domestic Violence:

Is the Church an Accomplice, Conspirator, or Balm in Gilead? ©

"...when[Tamar] brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.' She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel...' But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

"...Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went. Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn."

-- 2 Sam 13:11-14, 19-21

by

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Introduction

The exaltation of the suffering and self-sacrifice motif in Protestant Christian pedagogy presents a dangerous message for the victim of domestic violence. The church's silence around matters of intimate partner violation is complicitous behavior that imputes to the religious institution accomplice status in the commission of the sin and the crime. This paper critiques the traditional Christian motifs of suffering and self-sacrifice as they relate to the lived experiences of domestic violence victim-survivors, and, in turn, compounds their violation. By examining the perspectives of theologians on related topics, this paper examines methods by which Christian theology, pedagogy, and local church institutions can be purged of this historical, structural and personal sin through concrete policies and practices. Thereby, this study involves a deconstruction of Western theological archetypes, and the construction of a liberating Womanist ethic of social justice for this marginalized class of people.

Constructing a Womanist ethic that can affect social justice in the Christian Church for domestic violence victim-survivors requires identifying mechanisms for dialogue and training that can be developed and facilitated in a manner that is preventative, rehabilitative, and restorative. Elements of Latin American liberation theologies also inform this work. Concepts of historical, structural and personal sin are implicit to the argument in this paper. Latin American theologians Gustavo Gutierrez and Jon Sobrino largely inform these

concepts. I utilize them here because their writings relate to beliefs and experiences of communal responsibility.

I use the identifier of Womanist in light of Alice Walker's definition, which states:

Womanist, from womanish. (opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interest in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.¹

My stylistic approach is uniquely Womanist because I utilize the stories of Black women and men victim-survivors as a fundamental source for doing theology.

Victim-survivors need responsible theologies, counseling and pedagogical practices that help them make sense of God's involvement in and relationship to their issues of violation. This study is needed particularly (though not exclusively) in the Christian community for myriad reasons.

Since mainstream theology resources are so limited on this topic, I often found myself looking to other disciplines and feminist theo-ethicists for insight on domestic violence studies. Feminist theologians and ethicists, as well as feminist critical scholars in law and the humanities, have been quite progressive in

¹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, 11.

tackling these issues as perpetrated by men on women or children. In turn, addressing a few semantic challenges is appropriate.

Traci West inspires use of the term "victim-survivor" in this paper. In her book, *Wounds of the Spirit*, she uses the term in referring to women who have experienced what she calls "intimate violence."² She does so "to rhetorically remind us of the dual status of women who have been both victimized by violent assault and have survived it."³ Rather than referring to these individuals as simply "victims" and thereby leaving them "victim-ized," I choose to use the "victim-survivor" terminology. Like West, I believe that Black women and men are sometimes denied an opportunity to have their victimization recognized. "The strength of [Black women's] coping and survival abilities is commonly emphasized at the expense of an appreciation of their injury and anguish. Multiple aspects of both victimization and survival are represented in women's experiences of, and reactions to, male violence."⁴

Although I occasionally use the term "intimate partner violence," I reject West's use of the phrase, "intimate violence," in reference to acts of sexual aggression and violence. West states that her reasoning for using this term is "because of the character of the relationship between the attacker and the victim,

² West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 5.

³ West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 5.

⁴ West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 5.

or the nature of the act."⁵ She avers, "a stranger rape would still be considered intimate violence even though the assault did not take place in the context of an ongoing intimate relationship."⁶ However, the word "intimate" denotes familiarity, closeness, and endearment. Even if the relationship that exists between the perpetrator and victim once was intimate, violence is never intimate. Intimacy is entirely inappropriate in this context. Nevertheless, the terminology of "domestic" violence is equally problematic.

Violence cannot be domesticated. It is wild and untamed. Violence, wherever it occurs, is an abuse of power -- a violation of personhood. Yet, in this paper, I opt for using the term *domestic violence* as a legal term of art rather than *intimate violence*. State laws commonly use *domestic violence* because the violence occurs and relates to the home, household, family, and household affairs. The primary concern is for public safety and public health; and when one in three victims routinely are violated in their households, particularly by spouses, then we are dealing with a serious public health epidemic.

In turn, this paper uses the terminology and definitions developed during the criminalization of violence against women in U.S. courts. It is important to note that a husband's use of physical violence to exert power and control over his wife was not conceptualized as domestic violence for most of our country's

⁵ West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 4.

⁶ West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 4.

history.⁷ Instead, the U.S. legal system provided men with numerous rights and responsibilities that it denied to women. An essential part of that formal system was societal tolerance for so-called private matters between marital partners. The women's movement of the 1970s brought public attention to the prevalence of domestic violence, and as a result, initiated dramatic reforms in civil and criminal justice policy to address such violence.⁸ Within twenty years, there were significant changes in arrest and prosecution policies to criminalize domestic violence, an increase in services for battered women, and a notable shift in the public's attitude against domestic violence.⁹

Globally, according to the World Health Organization (“WHO”), “one of the most common forms of violence against women is that performed by a husband

⁷ Sack, “From the Right of Chastisement to the Criminalization of Domestic Violence: A Study in Resistance to Effective Policy Reform.”

⁸ Walker, *The Battered Woman*. The Ohio Supreme Court stated in holding that expert testimony on battered women's syndrome was admissible: Expert testimony on the battered woman syndrome would help dispel the ordinary layperson's perception that a woman in a battering relationship is free to leave at any time. The expert evidence would counter any “common sense” conclusions by the jury that if the beatings were really that bad the woman would have left her husband much earlier. Popular misconceptions about battered women would be put to rest, including the beliefs that the women are masochistic and enjoy the beatings and that they intentionally provoke their husbands into fits of rage. *State v. Koss*, 551 N.E.2d 970, 973 (1990).

⁹ Sack, “From the Right of Chastisement to the Criminalization of Domestic Violence: A Study in Resistance to Effective Policy Reform.”

or male partner.”¹⁰ When “legal systems and cultural norms do not treat [domestic violence] as a crime, but rather as a ‘private’ family matter, or a normal part of life” the WHO notes that officials often ignore such violence. The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (“VAWA”) was an attempt to change and begin institutionalizing the deterrence and punishment of domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of violence against women. Passed by the U.S. Congress after several years of advocacy, VAWA created resources and legal changes to remedy the problem of domestic violence nationally. “The legislation included funding for each state to provide domestic violence training and expansion of services for law enforcement, prosecution, and victim advocates, and established a national domestic violence hotline.”¹¹ Additional protections offered by VAWA includes (1) full faith and credit to valid protection orders from other jurisdictions every state and territory, including tribal lands,¹² and (2) federal criminalization of crossing state lines with the intent to commit domestic violence

¹⁰ World Health Organization. Gender, equity, human rights: gender based violence. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Archived from the original on 23 April 2015. Retrieved 5 October 2016 from <https://web.archive.org/web/20150423143519/http://www.who.int/gender/violence/gbv/en/>.

¹¹ Violence Against Women Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-322, 108 Stat. 1902-55 (codified in scattered sections of 18 U.S.C., 28 U.S.C., and 42 U.S.C.); see also 42 U.S.C. §§3796gg-3796hh (2006) (describing grant programs authorized under VAWA to strengthen domestic violence law enforcement, prosecution and victim services programs).

¹² 18 U.S.C. § 2265 (2006).

or violate a protection order federal crimes.¹³ The passage of this legislation was both a recognition of significant change as well as an initiation of further policy shifts in domestic violence so that making additional progress seemed inevitable.

Battery, assault, stalking, and sex crimes occur most often in domestic violence cases. According to the American Law Institute Model Penal Code, sex crimes may include sodomy, incest, pedophilia, sexual assault, and sexual battery.¹⁴ These are neither intimate crimes, nor are they acts of intimate violence. They are crimes of power -- criminal acts of violence.

Every day, innocent women and men "suffer" as victims of domestic violence. Predators often target children and the mentally disabled as defenseless subjects for sexual manipulation and abuse. Wives and female partners, particularly, often suffer that and numerous other manifestations of dominance, power, and control. Each *suffers* the pains associated with the loss of autonomy over his/her bodily integrity and its sacred-nature. Many have *sacrificed* their will to vile perpetrators under force and/or threat of imminent

¹³ 18 U.S.C. §§2261-2262 (2006). The Gun Control Act of 1994 also included a provision that people subject to qualifying state protection orders may not possess firearms or ammunition as long as the protection order is in effect. 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(8) (2006). Subsequent legislation expanded the firearm prohibition to persons previously convicted of a qualifying misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(9), and created a federal crime for interstate stalking, 18 U.S.C. § 2261A.

¹⁴ *Model Penal Code* (Philadelphia, PA: American Law Institute, 1962).

death. Others have been "sacrificed" by a skewed sense of obedience to the so-called Christian concepts of nonresistance and pacifism.

Theological Considerations

Reconciling fighting for justice, liberating from oppression, and suffering for the sake of Christ often presents an ethical conundrum for Christian practitioners. The first two concepts generally seemed entirely antithetical to the third. Yet, Jesus' call of Levi to take up one's cross, deny one's self, and follow Christ is understood as the Christian's clarion call to suffering and self-sacrifice. This is often taught as the centerpiece from which all else emanates in Christian theology. Is this not an oppressive theology? Isn't there some discrepancy here? Did not Isaiah and Christ say that the Spirit of the Lord anoints one to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor? Was Christ not a liberationist? How then is following Christ equivalent to justifying, rationalizing, or endorsing suffering? And how does this apply in the context of domestic violence?

European male theologians (and Western thinkers in general) have historically espoused interpretations, pedagogies and theologies without contextualization as though theirs is a universal truth. Unfortunately, many practitioners (pastors, scholars, and laypersons alike) have accepted and utilized these concepts in like manner. One of the most popular examples of this is

Deitrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. In this text, he articulates a theology wherein true discipleship mandates a requisite obedience to suffering -- "only [one] who believes is obedient and only [one] who is obedient believes."¹⁵ For Bonhoeffer, "[s]uffering is the badge of true discipleship."¹⁶ Unidentified oppressors were apparently his anticipated audience.

The social locations of Bonhoeffer and other so-called "classical" European theologians disclose an inherent assumption of such "cost of discipleship" paradigms. As European men of privileged economic status growing up in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century, they had multifarious options. They could even choose to sacrifice themselves. Moreover, they could choose to suffer. In a similar manner, this theological model presumes an optional submission to suffering -- a choice of self-sacrifice -- an acceptance of evil. While it is unlikely that either would have endorsed exploitative suffering, they were limited by their contexts and could only foresee certain implications of their words. It should be noted, however, that even Bonhoeffer in later works, such as Ethics, recognizes the limitations of this theology and the need for contextualization.

Oppression depends on one's context and perspective. Even Jurgen Moltmann acknowledges that oppression always has two aspects: on the one

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 63.

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 91.

side stand the oppressors, on the other side the oppressed. "On the one side stands the master, on the other side the slave; on the one side the exploiter, on the other his victim; on the one side the victor, on the other those who are subjugated."¹⁷ He goes on to state that "oppression destroys humanity on both sides but in different ways: on the one side through evil, on the other through suffering. The evil of the one is the cause of the suffering of the other, and the latter is the consequence of the former."¹⁸

Therefore, the need for contextualization is clear. Even in the scriptures of the New Testament, Jesus contextualizes. Jesus' commands differ when he is speaking to the oppressed/victimized than when he is speaking to the oppressors/victimizers. For instance, Levi was a tax collector. He, like Nicodemus, was one of the wealthier members of the society. Both Levi and Nicodemus are commanded to "suffer" and "sacrifice" their affluence as means of salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of God. Yet, when interacting with the ailing, blind, and disenfranchised, Jesus' message through his actions or his words is one of liberation and empowerment.

In the formative work, *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez says that his historical context and the experiences of many Christians in that context

¹⁷ Moltmann, "The Liberation of Oppressors," 69.

¹⁸ Moltmann, "The Liberation of Oppressors," 69.

led liberation theology to speak of salvation in Christ in terms of liberation.¹⁹

Liberation theology is thus intended as a theology of salvation that includes not only the actions of the Divine, but also the actions of human beings as they respond to divine initiatives.²⁰ "To speak about a theology of liberation is to seek an answer to the following question: what relation is there between salvation and the historical process of human liberation? In other words," Gutierrez says, "we must attempt to discern the interrelationship among the different meanings of the term liberation."²¹ This means listening to the "muted cry [that] wells up from the millions of human beings, pleading with their pastors for a liberation that is nowhere to be found in their case."²² This encompasses working for not only the spiritual, economic, and social empowerment of a person, but the whole person in all dimensions.

Universality is a myth. If there is such a thing as "the universal" I imagine it would be God. Yet, even God relates to different people(s) according to the needs of each -- respecting and/or creating the truths of people's particular experiences. Domestic violence victim-survivors, as all historically oppressed and victimized people, must critically evaluate the applicability of theologies that

¹⁹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 37.

²⁰ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 39.

²¹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 29.

²² Medellin, 2, as quoted in Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 37.

would serve to further their oppression and victimization. Since the Bible plays such a prominent role in the Christian Church, it is important that the liberating message of the Bible is seen as over and against the oppressive elements in the Bible.²³ Biblical interpretation must include thorough congregational exegesis that examines the communal and individual historicity of a people in determining the applicability of a particular text to that particular people.

The need for contextualization is even greater when more distinct aspects of particularity are identified in subgroupings, such as victim-survivors of domestic violence. For these persons, oppression is no abstract concept about which they theorized. In this context, victimization is a consuming reality. The painful particularity of domestic violence and specifically, sexual violation, requires the relativizing or rejecting of the suffering and self-sacrifice motif in Christian pedagogy. Liberation demands it. There is no such thing as "choosing" to accept these evils. The sacrifice has occurred. The suffering is involuntarily thrust upon them.

Restorative Theological Contributions from the Margins

Liberation ethicists and theologians, as well as some aspects of the African American religious experience, offer paradigmatic shifts that can contribute to the the broader Christian church's responses to domestic violence. To illustrate this, Jacquelyn Grant asserts that there must be a self-critical

²³ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 218.

(evaluative) dimension to theology.²⁴ In fact, she states, "theology must not only be reflection upon the lived realities of the faithful, but it must also be prophetic; that is, it must raise the critical and sometimes difficult questions that arise out of the various contradictions of life."²⁵ Every theology must confront suffering, determine the fundamental form of suffering, and work to do something about it.²⁶ Unless theology does this, its historical relevance and integral development are in jeopardy. For, as Paul Tillich argued, Christian theology ought to correlate the questions emerging out of the human situation with the answers as they are found in the gospel message.

As Christians in marginalized communities question dominant Western theology, domestic violence victim-survivors struggle with the efficacy of seeking assistance in Christian churches. Out of dissatisfaction with the legal systems, many victims seek restorative resources designed specifically for their needs but is the church prepared to provide adequate remedies? In the historical Black Church, for example, Cecil Cone argued that because white people developed Western theology, and other fields of Western intellectual activity, the expertise/import of Black people and Black religion are ignored.²⁷ Therefore, "it is

²⁴ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 199.

²⁵ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 199.

²⁶ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 29.

²⁷ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 18.

not surprising," he states, "that a large part of its methods and results are inappropriate for Black theologians."²⁸ Furthermore, Cone argues that as long as African-American scholars allow Euro-American analytical concepts to serve as the point of departure in Black Religious Studies, there will be a distortion in the essence of what is intended to be analyzed. He concludes that contemporary writers of Black theology cannot probe the depths and scope of Black religion if they use the academic tools of white theologians.

Black theology, as coined in the works of James Cone, arose as an attempt to stem the tide of the irrelevance of Christianity to the liberation struggles of African-Americans in the 1960s.²⁹ Nonetheless, the roots of Black theology extend to the origins of Black history. Particularly, the work of Black revolutionaries such as Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, David Walker, and Henry McNeil Turner informed and influenced the codification of Black theology.³⁰ Cone states, "Blacks have a usable heritage, a revolutionary past, that can give direction in the search for the truth of the gospel in the struggle for Black freedom."³¹ Of great importance was the use of scripture by

²⁸ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 18-19.

²⁹ Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 182.

³⁰ Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 183.

³¹ Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 183.

Black freedom fighters in support of Black resistance to and rebellion against oppression and slavery.³²

White theologians and preachers often denied any relationship between the scriptures and the African American struggle for freedom, so Black theologians "bypassed the classic Western theological tradition and went directly to Scripture for its word regarding our Black struggle."³³ Basing themselves on the exodus and the message of the prophets, Black theologians asserted that God is known by God's acts in history and that these acts are identical with the liberation of the weak, the poor and the oppressed.³⁴ Revelation was not an abstract propositional truth but rather a historical event, God's involvement in history.³⁵

While Black and Womanist theology agree on the importance of revelation and experience, Womanist theologians often critique Black theology for presenting Black male experience as "black experience."³⁶ Delores Williams asserts that Black liberation theologians use biblical paradigms supporting an androcentric bias in their theological statements, but the African-American

³² Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 185.

³³ Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 187.

³⁴ Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 187.

³⁵ Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," 187.

³⁶ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 1.

community has used the Bible quite differently.³⁷ "For over one hundred years, the community had appropriated the Bible in such a way that Black women's experience figured just as eminently as black men's in the community's memory, in its self-understanding and in its understanding of God's relation to its life."³⁸ Historically, in African-American communities, "the authority of the Bible was also determined by what the community added to the Bible and called 'scripture' right along with the Bible as scripture."³⁹

Theological investigation into the experiences of Christian African-American women reveals that, historically, they considered the Bible to be a major source of religious validation in their lives.⁴⁰ Yet, African-American women's relationship with God preceded their introduction to the Bible. In this paradigm, God's revelation is two-fold: (1) God's revelation directly to them, and (2) God's revelation as witnessed in the Bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience.⁴¹ Jacquelyn Grant contends that African-American women operate

³⁷ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 1.

³⁸ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 1-2.

³⁹ Williams, "Sources of Black Female Spirituality: The Ways of 'the Old Folks' and Women Writers," 188.

⁴⁰ Grant, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology," 215.

⁴¹ Grant, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology," 215.

with a “triple consciousness” that enables them to liberate Jesus and the Christian message as the Christian message and Jesus continue to liberate them.⁴² Like forebear Sojourner Truth, therefore, a womanist theology must “compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness” in them.⁴³

The problem that arises in the domestic violence context is whether God's revelation to the victim-survivor is one of abandoner, co-sufferer, violator, co-conspirator, or liberator. We find many witnesses in historical records. For instance, Grant highlights the testimony of one unidentified enslaved woman who identified with Jesus because she believed Jesus identified with her.⁴⁴ As God incarnate, Jesus' solidarity meant divine empowerment. Grant writes,

As Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they. His suffering culminated in the crucifixion. Their crucifixion included rapes, and husbands being castrated..., babies being sold, and other cruel and often murderous treatments.⁴⁵

On the other hand, there are stories of victim-survivors like Harriet Brent Jacobs, who wrote under the pseudonym, Linda Brent, during the 1800s. Recounting the vivid torment of sexual harassment and exploitation suffered

⁴² Grant, “The Sin of Servanthood,” 213.

⁴³ Olive Gilbert, as cited by Grant, “Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology,” 217.

⁴⁴ Grant, “Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology,” 217.

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during her enslavement, Jacobs mentions her sense of God's absence in the midst of the conditions she faced.⁴⁶ Like so many others, Jacobs struggled with issues of imputed shame and defilement. Traci West's research suggests that a sense of God's disfavor seems to have evoked some of the deepest levels of despair in women victim-survivors.⁴⁷ Domestic violence victim-survivors can learn from applying the biblical hermeneutics used by these historically marginalized victims.

Sex, Sexuality, and the Church

Frequently, members cannot even begin a conversation in the church about domestic violence because many within the Christian Church do not want to talk about sex and sexuality. Moreover, discussing the ways in which sex and sexuality relate to abuses of power in the most vile, repugnant, and criminal sense are especially tenuous. Misguided efforts at restoring stasis or avoiding the issue also can lead to secondary traumatic injuries for domestic violence victims who often face shaming, rejection, ridicule, and greater danger.

Particularly, in the Black Church, these issues emerge from complex histories involving racism, classism, and sexism. Cornel West states that, historically, Black institutions such as families, schools and churches have refused "to engage one fundamental issue: black sexuality. Instead, they [run]

⁴⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 26-28, 54-55.

⁴⁷ West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 28.

from it like the plague. And they obsessively [condemn] those places where black sexuality is flaunted: the streets, clubs, and the dance-halls,"⁴⁸ and I would add, in the home. Kelly Brown Douglas and Emilie Townes hold that the Black community is "sexually repressed," that is, unable to speak honestly about matters of sexuality.⁴⁹

Kelly Brown Douglas traces this silence on matters of sexuality to two primary factors. First is the impact of white supremacist culture upon Black sexuality. Second is the influence of Western notions of spiritualistic dualism that attribute to the body and the spirit respective evil and good characteristics. Douglas argues that the attack of white supremacist culture has rendered the Black community virtually impotent in its ability to conduct frank, open, and demanding discourse concerning matters of sexuality.⁵⁰ A history of having their sexuality exploited and used as a weapon to support their oppression has discouraged the Black community from freely engaging sexual concerns.⁵¹ That such discourse might affirm stereotyping Black people as hypersexual, animalistic, and obsessed with sexual matters strongly undergirds Black people's reticence to openly confront concerns related to sexuality.

⁴⁸ West, *Race Matters*, 86.

⁴⁹ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 67.

⁵⁰ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 67.

⁵¹ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 68.

This coupled with Western Christianity's tendency toward demonizing the matters of "the flesh" has wreaked havoc on life and wholeness for Christians globally. The dubious separation between body and spirit was crafted primarily in Platonic and neo-Platonic thought. This Greco-Roman world of dualistic philosophy greatly influenced the leading shapers of Western Christianity such as the Apostle Paul, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Douglas states that, essentially, the Western Christian tradition opened wide the door for the possibility of utilizing sexual practices, and sexuality, as a means for devaluing and demonizing human beings.⁵²

Using these suppressive approaches, along with theologies of suffering and self-sacrifices, often causes additional trauma for victims of domestic violence. When a wife chooses to report her husband's violence to her pastor rather than the courts, pastors may shame victims about sexual matters with spirit over the flesh metaphors or advise her to submit to her husband as a sacrificial offering to God. Doing so, not only often exposes victims to danger and worse violence, but also creates secondary traumatic injuries.⁵³ This phenomena can occur in therapeutic, legal, and religious settings.

Proposing a New Paradigm

⁵² Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 19-23.

⁵³ Nelson and Wampler, "Systemic Effects of Trauma in Clinic Couples: an Exploratory Study of Secondary Trauma Resulting from Childhood Abuse," 171-184.

To change the cyclical trend that double-traumatizes victims of domestic violence, the Christian Church must critically assess and change some of the concepts fundamental to traditional theology. To help domestic violence victims achieve healing and wholeness as survivors, Christian churches must reject false dualisms like the flesh versus spirit dichotomies because they are a part of an ideological system of binary oppositions that include socially shared cognitive devices that oppress multiple groups.

For instance, Aristotle's *Pythagorean Table of Opposites*, from which the flesh versus spirit contrast emerged, also contrasts blackness as "evil" (or dirty, cursed, poor) as opposed to whiteness as the "good" (pure, blessed, rich). Likewise, this dualism has sustained patriarchy's preeminence by relegating women to the "evil" (or irrational, sinful, immature) side and men to the "good" (sensible, clean, mature) side. In doing so, Western thought manipulates religion and sexuality as effective tools for justifying domination over others.⁵⁴

In some Eastern cultures, there is no such dualism. For many African religious traditions, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular. If we can make this necessary transition, then the conversation can continue toward rehabilitative frameworks, pedagogies, and ethics.

Rehabilitative Pedagogical Concerns

⁵⁴ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 19-23.

The cover page of this paper includes the Old Testament account of the rape of Tamar as recorded in the second book of Samuel. I chose this story for three primary reasons. First, it is the only detailed account of a violent rape in the Bible. Second, it shows the victim, victimizer, and family before, during, and after the crime. Third, it offers a view of the dynamics that develop when a family or community fails to respond to domestic violence. This highlights the need for rehabilitation on three levels: (1) rehabilitation for the victim, (2) rehabilitation for the perpetrator, and (3) rehabilitation for the institution.

The world is groaning for deliverance and, like King David, the church often does nothing, or like Absalom, the church does the wrong thing. I do not believe that this is out of a desire to do wrong or be complicit with criminal activity. Issues run far deeper than that. I do believe that the church and its membership would do better, if they were better equipped. The Christian Church and community, often engages in a conspiracy of silence to protect attackers because of a sense of familial obligation that desires to "keep the peace" rather than seek justice. We fail to realize that where there is no justice, there really is no peace.

Meanwhile, disillusionment with the lack of justice and rehabilitation in the criminal justice system—as well as biblical scriptures—frequently influence well-meaning persons to report abuse to church leaders. In trying to handle matters intra-communally, victims then often are subjected to faith communities that may

lack the requisite resources to address crimes like domestic violence. Many times back room conversations, quieting attempts, or misguided counseling sessions take the place of beneficial rehabilitation processes.

U.S. criminal law has attempted to address the increase in reported cases of domestic violence by expanding definitions and punishments to address the differing degrees of severity. Likewise, the medical fields have enhanced technologies to assist in the diagnoses, treatment and collection of evidence relative to these crimes. However, traditional Christian theologians and practitioners appear to be willing to continue in a shame-ridden and shame-perpetuating silence that protects the perpetrators and traumatizes (or ignores) the victims. All the while these religious institutions continue to promulgate non-contextualized so-called "classical" theological positions of prior eras without modifying them to address these pertinent contemporary dilemmas.

When will the church bind these brokenhearted? How can the church proclaim release from their captivity and suffering? What is the good news that the Christian message offers them? Shall we tell them to suffer more? Will we suggest they sacrifice more of themselves? Can we simply ignore the particularity of their pain? How many more victims will the church traumatize further by abandoning them—or worse, throwing them into additional danger in returning to a household that is not safe?

Victim-Survivor Rehabilitation

Grant states that suffering is problematic in light of Jesus' lifetime experiences and the experiences of Black women.⁵⁵ The common offering of suffering and self-sacrifice theologies is that through suffering justice is established. We often rush to these types of apologetic explanations and justifications about Christ's sufferings without struggling with the intensity of its graphic, painful, and dehumanizing reality. In turn, we do the same thing with human suffering. All too often, we rush to make sense of one's suffering before we allow that person to reclaim her voice from the suffering. Perhaps the reason for the epistemological move is because church leaders do not want to face the reality of their own pain and suffering.

In Christ, God stands with the oppressed; and therefore, empowers human beings to reject the dehumanizing aspects of suffering.⁵⁶ Grant states that "power" and "mutual empowerment" are the integral issues in understanding and theologizing about suffering.⁵⁷ In *Becoming Human*, white feminist Letty Russell states that the power and glory amid suffering most clearly shines through "those whose lives are confronting the suffering by **saying no** [emphasis added] to its dehumanizing power."⁵⁸ For victims of domestic violence, this is especially true.

⁵⁵ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 202-204.

⁵⁶ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 202-204.

⁵⁷ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 204.

⁵⁸ Russell, *Becoming Human*, 57.

Well-meaning counselors, ministers, families, and friends often rush to bandage a bleeding, gaping wound because domestic violence is such an invasive emotional, mental, and physical violation. Scriptures and clichés are two of numerous methods used to mute the victim’s screams, tears, and pain. Much like Absalom in the biblical story of Tamar, we just want to make it better and make it go away. In the context of domestic violence, however, silence and denial are two of the most debilitating aspects of the abuse whether their limitations are exacted internally or externally. Acknowledgement of the truth is always the first step in any process of recovery. Domestic violence victim-survivors are persons whose voices and autonomy were denied them in the experience of the criminal act. The church must empower victims of domestic violence to develop a theo-ethic of resistance that says "no" to their suffering -- to say "no" to their unique type of self-sacrifice.

"Suffering can maim, wither, and cripple the heart."⁵⁹ Self-sacrifice can kill one's spirit, one's fervor for life, and one's desire to live. We not only need to resist suffering, but we also must resist the tendency to "overspiritualize" suffering. Sure, we must, as Cheryl Townsend Gilkes says, "repair our inner visions in order to live...in a hateful and troubling world."⁶⁰ Nonetheless, healing takes time, patience, faith and medical assistance. It takes even more to

⁵⁹ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 109.

⁶⁰ Gilkes, "The 'Loves' and 'Troubles' of African-American Women's Bodies," 245.

empower victims of domestic violence to reject the dehumanizing aspects of their suffering. Submitting to evil, non-resistance, and patient endurance either leads to further suffering or death. Neither eliminates real pain and/or suffering.⁶¹

Only once victims are empowered to resist and/or eliminate exploitative suffering can the transformative effects occur that ethicists like Stan Hauerwas suggest can evolve from suffering and self-sacrifice. Such notions may be a helpful pastoral care methods for making sense of these painful experiences in post-trauma counseling.⁶² Teresa Snorton, for example, says that the historical experience of slavery embedded in the African-American culture "the concept that eventually God would intervene on behalf of the suffering but that in the meantime the sufferer can be sustained by the belief in God's presence in the midst."⁶³ This, however, depends upon one's context and professional judgment about the appropriate point at which this discussion should enter one's rehabilitation process.

There are many more matters to be explored in this area. For example, when is it appropriate to shift the focus from resistance to forgiveness? I agree that forgiveness and providential beliefs are important to the Christian's faith system, but our primary task must be the concrete eradication of the sin and

⁶¹ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 209.

⁶² Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 52.

⁶³ Snorton, "The Legacy of the African-American Matriarch: New Perspectives for Pastoral Care," 58.

suffering of domestic violence. So I resist rushing to "forgive" before there has been proper redress. The initial focal point of such a rehabilitative method for domestic violence victims must be the resistance, rejection, and elimination of suffering. After all, in Christ's resurrection -- the transcendence of death -- we find biblical authority that supports the ultimate overcoming of human suffering and evil.

Perpetrator Rehabilitation

Oppression and the system of oppression destroy humanity on both sides: oppressors become inhuman, while the oppressed are dehumanized.⁶⁴ "The inhumanity of the former brings about the dehumanization of the latter."⁶⁵ Because oppression has these two aspects, the process of liberation from oppression must begin simultaneously on both these sides: the liberation from suffering under oppression occurs simultaneously with the liberation of oppressors from the sin of oppression.⁶⁶ Jacquelyn Grants' definition of justice through discipleship is one wherein the oppressors simultaneously give up or lose oppressive power, as oppressed people are empowered.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Moltmann, "The Liberation of Oppressors," 69.

⁶⁵ Moltmann, "The Liberation of Oppressors," 69.

⁶⁶ Moltmann, "The Liberation of Oppressors," 69.

⁶⁷ Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood," 216.

Here, Jon Sobrino offers great contributions on the rehabilitation of victimizers. Even though his context is that of the Latin American poor, Christian liberation theologies and practices broadly may gain much from engaging in dialogue with the theology that he presents in *The Principle of Mercy*. Sobrino suggests that that acknowledgement of one's personal sin and the acceptance of forgiveness can provide enormous impetus for the eradication of historical sin.⁶⁸ Acknowledging one's sin is the first step in the eradication of both personal and historical sin.

Sobrino states that it is a good thing to acknowledge one's own sin because then forgiveness recovers its dimensions as good news for the human being.⁶⁹ This dimension is hidden when human beings fail to recognize themselves for what they are historically.⁷⁰ Personal sin is not the only sin in need of recompense here, but Christians are additionally called to see and try to resolve the "negative ultimacy" to which others are subjected as a result of institutional or structural sins (this is discussed further in the next subsection).⁷¹

⁶⁸ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 83.

⁶⁹ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 84.

⁷⁰ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 84, 86.

⁷¹ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 86.

This unmasking of the truth of one's sin is performed with a view to, and in terms of, salvation through the eradication of personal and historical sin.⁷²

Yet, Sobrino offers a theology for redemptively loving enemies in the midst of suffering that may be more agreeable for victim-survivors of domestic violence. It is a theology that resists suffering and seeks to ultimately eradicate suffering. In *The Principle of Mercy*, he suggests the method of "denouncing [enemies], unmasking them, cursing them, and threatening them so that they are no longer our enemies [for] the only way they can be saved is by destroying them as sinners."⁷³ Collectively, the church must denounce abusers—unmask them, curse them, and threaten them. What is the risk of loss for violent perpetrators in the church? Are they rewarded with new starts among innocent congregations who are ignorant of the danger in their midst? Or, are there consequences that require change such as mandatory reporting, psychiatric compliance standards, or restorative justice measures? In what ways does the church shine light in the dark?

It is important, however, that we do not rush to Sobrino's "spirituality of forgiveness" without recognizing its depth and conviction. Foundational to his theology is Jesus' cry upon the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is not an acquittal, but an indictment. For Sobrino, using

⁷² Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 65-66, 89, 94-95.

⁷³ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 65.

Jesus as point of departure, sin is understood in terms of forgiveness.⁷⁴ Here, *forgiveness is truth that sheds light upon one's sinful reality and provides strength for one's conversion* – personally and historically.⁷⁵ He views this as a power-filled Christian response to the sinner – personal and historical – in hopes of transforming evil into good. A positive, mutually complementary relation must obtain between personal forgiveness and the eradication of concrete, historical sin.⁷⁶

In this sense of transformation—or conversion—the latter discussion and this one cannot be separated. A paradoxical form of love, this forgiveness offers sinners salvation by destroying them as sinners.⁷⁷ However, in the case of personal as well as historical sin, Sobrino states that the world of oppressors do not wish to be forgiven in the same way that they do not wish to acknowledge their sins.⁷⁸ For Sobrino, the poor and oppressed are God's manifestation and they are the only ones with the right to demand conversion and offer forgiveness.⁷⁹ He argues that the poor and oppressed regularly offer this

⁷⁴ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 89.

⁷⁵ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 93-95.

⁷⁶ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 94.

⁷⁷ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 65.

⁷⁸ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 99.

⁷⁹ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 67-68, 97-100.

acceptance to oppressors who, when received, not only know themselves in the truth of their sin but also in their forgiveness and possibility.⁸⁰ As such, these persons experience a transformation and reorient their lives in terms of their responsibility to the healing of the oppressed.⁸¹

The reconciliation that Sobrino envisions from this process is one in which all parties are to co-exist together with solidarity amid the historical eradication of sin in the world.⁸² From this place, there is a future of God's kingdom in history.⁸³ For salvation is the liberation from oppression and the eradication of sin through the transformation that takes place within the personal and historical sinner.⁸⁴

There are several victim-offender mediation models that are used in alternative dispute resolution ("ADR") efforts toward this notion of rehabilitative and restorative justice. One of the more promising models is one that considers ritual, forgiveness, and scapegoating as an institutional church response to victimization and rehabilitation of offenders. Most notably, Thee Smith advances this model, based on the scapegoat theories of Gerard. There needs to be more of this type of training and facilitation occurring in our churches and communities. This is an area that warrants further research for its efficacy in equipping faith

⁸⁰ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 99.

⁸¹ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 99.

⁸² Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 68, 102.

⁸³ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 68.

⁸⁴ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 68, 102.

communities and their leaderships to work with domestic violence perpetrators and victim-survivors.

Much of this may seem incredibly romanticized and overly optimistic. I generally resist attempts at overspiritualizing and eschatologizing for this reason. While I hope criminals can be successfully transformed, the healing and well-being of victims are my primary concern. Yet, perpetrator rehabilitation and restoration is best left to organizations such as Atlanta's Men Stopping Violence, which provides excellent evidence and a long history of success in that area. Because statistics show that violent crime offenders and sexual predators rarely strike only once, and the fact that research suggests that a large percentage of apprehended domestic violence perpetrators admit to having been victims in violent homes as children, that too is an important part of destroying the sinner.

Institutional Rehabilitation

Jon Sobrino asserts that the theology of liberation insists on the reality and gravity of concrete historical sin; the possibility and urgency of defeating it; and the thesis that a concrete, historical eradication is the most adequate defeat.⁸⁵ This historical sin is broken into two subparts: personal sin and structural sin.⁸⁶ In the context of domestic violence, the personal sin is committed against the victim by the actual criminal. The structural sin, however, is committed against the

⁸⁵ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 83.

⁸⁶ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 64-65.

victim by the systems and structures that allow and/or enable the perpetration of the crime. Hence, much of the previous subsection's argument is applicable to the institution also. So here I will focus on more pedagogical and theological concerns for the church.

It is my contention that the church's promotion of suffering and self-sacrifice as conditions of discipleship can result in the commission of structural sin. My argument is that this model disempowers domestic violence victim-survivors of the power to reject and resist their suffering. I am supported by Carol Adams' position in *Woman-Battering* that "the suffering servant model may likely keep victims from establishing safety as their first priority and keeps them distracted from a focus on behavior."

The Christian community has plenty of its own soul-searching to do. This must occur for the elimination of the suffering that this structural sin causes and enables. In other words, before truly effective pastoral care and counseling can take place, there must be some acknowledgment and repentance for the failings of the community of faith. The church must confront, denounce, unmask, curse, and threaten the suffering of domestic violence in order to ultimately eradicate it.

Ours is the work of liberation. The praxis on which liberation theology reflects is the activity of "peacemakers" -- that is, those who are forging "shalom" in a praxis of solidarity in the interest of liberation that is inspired by the gospel.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 30.

Western languages translate the Hebrew word "shalom" as "peace" but in doing so, diminish its meaning. Shalom in fact refers to the whole of life and, as a part of this, to the need of establishing justice and peace.⁸⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr. was likely thinking on this when he stated, "true peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice."

The centerpiece of my understanding of calling and ministry has always incorporated a notion of partnership with God in the struggle against oppression, wherever it is found -- even in the Bible. This is, in fact, Grant's womanist proposal for modeling Christian discipleship. This is the model we need to be teaching by example.

The suffering of the domestically and sexually abused compels the church and the academy to modify traditional Christian theories and practices. Womanist theologian, M. Shawn Copeland, states that suffering is universal and an inescapable fact of the human condition.⁸⁹ She defines suffering as "the disturbance of our inner tranquility caused by physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual forces that we grasp as jeopardizing our lives, our very existence."⁹⁰ In "Wading through Many Sorrows," Copeland chronicles the experiences of suffering and affliction during the centuries of chattel slavery. Her objective is to

⁸⁸ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 30.

⁸⁹ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 109.

⁹⁰ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 109.

draw from these stories a womanist theology of suffering that struggles to grasp and manage pain and anguish, rather than be managed by this suffering.⁹¹ She acknowledges the negative quality of suffering that attempts to break the human spirit.⁹² The witness that emerges is one of women who experience the power of divine grace, not merely to sustain men and women through such evil, but to enable them to *change* victimization into Christian triumph.⁹³

According to Copeland, there must be a reevaluation of the Christian message that engages a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of resistance.⁹⁴ This reevaluation and reinterpretation must be rooted in a critical realism that rejects both naïve realism and idealism as adequate foundations for a theology of suffering.⁹⁵ The theological formula that results is one that, among other things, is resistant.⁹⁶ Resisting suffering, resisting degradation, resisting physical abuse, resisting emotional assault -- this womanist theology of suffering redefines "caricatured Christian virtues." "Because of the lives and suffering of Black women held in chattel slavery -- the meanings of forbearance, long-

⁹¹ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 111.

⁹² Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 118.

⁹³ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 119.

⁹⁴ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 122.

⁹⁵ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 122.

⁹⁶ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 118-124.

suffering, patience, love, hope, and faith can never again be ideologized."⁹⁷

Furthermore, suffering and self-sacrifice can no longer be ideologized.

Suffering and self-sacrifice must not be the object of our Christian mission. We must stop rationalizing suffering. We must start resisting, rebuking, and rejecting suffering. Suffering is an ultimate negativity. Suffering is never inseparable from evil.⁹⁸ The paradigm must shift its focal point to overcoming suffering and alleviating the need for self-sacrifice. Like Copeland, Jon Sobrino contends that theology must understand itself as "an intellectual exercise whose primary purpose is to eliminate...suffering. [S]uffering in today's world means primarily the sufferings of people who are being crucified, and the purpose of theology is to take these people down from the cross."⁹⁹ Specifically, Sobrino is addressing the context of economic oppression in underdeveloped countries. Relatedly, victims of domestic violence, as those denied power through abuse by those in positions of power, are among the crucified people that theology must take down from the cross.

Suffering is unwanted by God and in one way or another is a consequence of sin.¹⁰⁰ For Sobrino, suffering is not a private issue as with

⁹⁷ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 124.

⁹⁸ Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," 109.

⁹⁹ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 28.

Bonhoeffer, but suffering is a public experience that "constitutes the fundamental reality of our world...."¹⁰¹ The suffering of domestic violence is a public health crisis that threatens the safety and well being of all members of society. Like sex offenders, domestic abusers rarely strike once. The church must stop quieting victims and accommodating victimizers in back room conversations. To continue doing so is to be complicit in the commission of these crimes. Sermons, Sunday school lessons, and Bible studies must expose this historical evil and publicly, consistently, and unambiguously seek the elimination of domestic violence.

CONCLUSION

The harvest is passed, the summer has ended, and we are not liberated. The prophet Jeremiah records that in response to daughters crying in times of desolation and persecution, the Lord cries, "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed. I mourn and horror grips me." The prophet Jeremiah begs the question "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wounds of my people? Why are the daughters of Zion not healed?"

Of all the resources available in these most abundant areas of the world, why is there such deliberate indifference to the serious medical, spiritual, and psychological needs of domestic violence victims? Stripped of their humanity,

¹⁰¹ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 45.

crushed into abasement, and defiled to their core, domestic violence victims stand in desperate need. What will the followers of Jesus do?

James Cone and several womanist theologians, in the context of the African American experience, echo Gutierrez's question, "What is the meaning of salvation as an act of God?" I add, if liberation and salvation are interconnected concepts, then what does liberation mean for the victim-survivors of domestic violence?

It is time for the Christian community to reevaluate its promotion of suffering and self-sacrifice. **All** suffering must be contextualized and reassessed. Suffering must be considered in relation to power. At the very least, a theology of suffering and self-sacrifice must be sensitive to the unique circumstances of abuse victims in general, and domestic violence victim-survivors in particular. The church must take a stand with God on the side of these oppressed. Neither the church, nor I can silently witness the acts of the mockers, the scornful, and the victimizers any longer. We can no longer say with the rest of the world, "suck it up" or "take it like a lady."

It is time to stop the suffering and self-sacrifice of domestic violence. It is time for liberative Christian ethics, pedagogy, and theology that is sensitive to the needs of victim-survivors. Justice and healing are the primary goals. Yet, there are several important areas that require further and future exploration. Specifically: Are there Christian community models, resources and tools that

may work in this area? What do feminist and womanist theologies, philosophies, and practices contribute to this conversation? What unique perspectives do other liberation theologies offer regarding this dilemma? How can the Christian Church and community be assisted by Paulo Freire's concept of "conscientization" (the important initial historical moment/stage of transformation in which one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance) in this developmental process?

What is (or should be) the role of men in addressing these issues of domestic violence in Christian church congregations, especially when the victim-survivor is a woman or female child? Is there a generic male role and is there a different role needed of male church leadership? How do these two issues play out in the role of women? What should men/women functions in the rehabilitation process with victim-survivors of opposite genders? And how are same gender abuse situations distinct?

What are the best methods and strategies for this training and dialogue? Does there need to be a difference in how these issues are addressed with adult men and women, as opposed to children? How will the roles and functions of men, women, and children be affected in the church and family as a result of the implementation of such a program? And what about clergy persons and/or church members who are domestic abusers, violent predators, and/or sexual

offenders? How are denominational/governing bodies responding or failing to respond?

Would it be beneficial for the church to partner with community, medical, or legal organizations in redefining of some traditional Christian theologies and interpretations of scriptures? What would be the impact of bringing in these specialists for other congregational conversations, training, or workshops? What is the effect of and on the victim-survivor's image of God? What role does the image of the crucified Christ play in victim-survivor's healing? How would the use of alternative images affect victim-survivors' theologies? From which perspectives will resistance arise? What is the likely clerical response? What are the best means for preempting or negotiating these?

As we began with a question, we also end with questions, for there are no easy solutions in the context of domestic violence. We all must be willing to abide in the tensions created by the wounds until we develop its balm.

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