

Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse

Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn eds, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989),

Joanne Carlson Brown is professor of church history and ecumenics, St. Andrew's College, Saskatchewan, Canada. Carol R. Bohn is assistant professor of pastoral psychology, Boston University School of Theology.

As Rosemary Radford Ruether explains:

“Traditional patriarchal law denied women adults autonomous civil status. Women were treated legally as permanent minors and dependents of fathers and husbands. They had no rights to represent themselves politically as legal persons. Their right to inherit and transmit property was also limited and their earnings were regarded as belong to their husbands. Civilly, women were nonpersons who were represented by their male guardians, although the adult single woman and the widow had a somewhat anomalous status. The daughter or wife was in some sense property or chattel, regarded as being owned by her father or husband. Marriage was a business deal transacted between to males; the woman often had little say, at least legally. Women's legal status was assimilated into that of children and slaves as dependents and quasi property, as persons who had no right to assert their own will but who were bound under a yoke of obedience and servitude to their lords. The term ‘lord’ (*dominus*) was used simultaneously for God as Lord of the world, the aristocracy as masters of the lower classes, and finally male head of household as lord of his wife, children, and servants. The oft-repeated metaphor, drawn from St. Paul, that the woman has no head of her own, but her husband is her head as she is his body, sums up the subjugated status of woman.”

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *the Western Religious Tradition and Violence Against Women in the Home* Chapter 2: *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn, eds, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 31.

Rosemary Radford Ruether is Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology, Garrett Evangelical Theological School.

This theological ‘gangbanging’ of women went beyond depriving them of legal rights and excluding them from higher education and professional and leadership roles in church and society. In the patriarchal family parents had certain rights, including the right to beat their children. Some patriarchal societies, such as those of ancient Rome and Islam, even gave the father the right to kill or sell their children. The right to kill girl children has been exercised throughout history.

Carlson Brown & Bohn eds, *Patriarchy, and Abuse*, Chapter 2, Radford Ruether, *Violence Against Women* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 33-34.

Aristotle taught women were secondary biological species. The male contributed the form of the child in procreation. The woman was only an incubator who grew the child in her body. Normatively, every male seed would produce a perfect image of its maker, namely another male. ..Female by nature inferior in her capacity for thought, will, and physical activity. Women were natural slaves and, like slaves, it was their nature to be obedient servants in all things to their heads and masters. Scholastic theology adopted this theory and defined women as misbegotten males who have, by nature, a defective capacity for humanity. Theologically, this was expressed by Augustine's theory that women in themselves lacked the 'image of God.' ...Women also cannot represent Christ, who is perfect humanity. Therefore, only men can be priests and represent Christ in the Christian community, as well as headship in secular society. According to Luther, Eve was originally equal to Adam in the original creation; but because of her sin she was punished by God, demoted to a far inferior creature than she was originally, and she must suffer subjugation to the male as a punishment for her sin. Carlson Brown & Bohn eds, *Patriarchy, and Abuse*, Chapter 2, Radford Ruether, *Violence Against Women* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 31- 32.

According to Karen L. Bloomquist, sexual violence is viciously intertwined with patriarchy. Violence against women can be seen as the outgrowth of patriarchal social constructs that define the relationship between women and men as one of subordination and domination. Patriarchy is the complex of ideologies and structures that sustains and perpetuates male control over females. Patriarchy becomes a moral system in which power or control over is the central value not only in male-female relationships but throughout the social and natural order.

Karen L. Bloomquist, "Sexual Violence," *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, eds. Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 62. Bloomquist is Church and Society Staff, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Some suffering results from arbitrary, accidental sources such as natural disasters. However, much suffering is caused by human sinfulness; sinful acts by some bring suffering to others. These acts can generally be understood as acts of injustice. Victims of sexual or domestic violence have a strong tendency to hold God or themselves responsible for the abuse even though there is clearly a perpetrator whose actions resulted in the victims' suffering. Victim would feel the current suffering is God's punishment for the preceding 'sin' which God has judged... Two things result. First she/he is driven away from God by the pain and anger; second, no one is held accountable for what she/he has done to the victim.

Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn eds, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, Chapter 9, Marie F. Fortune, *The Transformation of Suffering: A Biblical and Theological Perspective*. (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 139-140. Marie Fortune was the founder and Executive Director, the Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.