

Excerpts

Excerpt from Chapter 1

The Ambiguity of Reconciliation

To discuss the phenomenon of intimate violence, its perpetrators and survivors, and the dynamics involved between these agents, we must first understand how such things are humanly possible. We must also see these dynamics within a larger framework that includes the appropriateness of reconciliation. As I argue below, the human is a relational being who has the capacity to violate and be violated, as well as the capacity to heal and to forgive, and must be open to transformation through a critical praxis. It must also be possible to draw from the many individual experiences and unique relationships some abstractions or theoretical reflections that combine to provide a relatively adequate description of the dynamics present in intimate violence. I maintain that the symbols present in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in spite of their capacity for ongoing dehumanization, also contain resources that can call us beyond violation and toward the formation of increasingly nurturing relationships. ...

Many classic symbols exist within the Christian tradition, including sin, hope, heaven, messiah, and grace. The classic that we will be examining throughout this project is that of "reconciliation." Reconciliation is a fundamental symbol of the Christian tradition. Reconciliation is distinct from forgiveness because it involves more than forgiveness and is a communal rather than an individual phenomenon. Reconciliation has its linguistic roots in re-conciliation, that is, rejoining the *concilium* or community. This aspect of rejoining the community is distinct from reunion, which is merely re-uniting something that was once a unity or a single entity. Instead we speak of rejoining a community, a community where each member has his or her own autonomy but also needs the support of the others in the community. The question we are asking is whether a violation within the community calls for reconciliation or ostracization. ...

The Dynamics of Domestic Violence

The dynamics of domestic violence must be clearly understood by pastoral professionals working with couples in various contexts. Further, it is the responsibility of the church community to advocate for those who suffer abuse at the hands of their partners. Advocacy for the safety and well being of those

violated is an important concern of this work, though not the central one. Many excellent books offer pastoral guidance on the church's relationship to survivors of domestic violence, and many of them can be found in this book's bibliography. I believe that these books have done an excellent job of addressing the needs of abused women, but the batterers are most often discussed only in relation to the women and children they have abused. Here I focus my reflections on the men who are abusive and the relationship that the church should have to these men. This book addresses the cause of the violence and claims that through a responsible, loving response to the batterer, the church community fulfills its call to "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). This is not a simple love but a complex dynamic of disciplined watchfulness and patient encouragement. Men who have been violent with their partners are members of our towns and cities and also members of our church communities. Our communities cannot abandon these men; abandonment will only exacerbate their situation. The Christian community has already done enough to endorse this violent behavior, as we will see in Chapter 3, but to neglect the responsibility to love and serve even the most violent and often unlikable people is unacceptable.

How does domestic violence occur, and what are its recurring characteristics? I draw on my own personal experience working with batterers as well as the social-scientific research of the last two decades to outline the basic features and to move from understanding to structural change. It is only after one comes to understand how men choose to be violent and why there remains a sense of desire to stay together after the violence, that one can move on to an appropriate response to intimate violence. I begin this analysis with a portrayal of a violent man. His story is not unique; in fact, its banality is what is most disturbing. ...