

Preface

Excerpt from the Preface

This project arises as a theological response to working with men who have been violent with their wives, lovers, and children. Having spent several years challenging the beliefs and confronting the denial of violent offenders, I have heard men tell their stories and have seen their victims' bruises, as well as their children's anguished and often futile attempts to "understand" the violence between their parents. The broken lives and bodies of these women and children, along with the confusion, arrogance, and despair of these men, are the concrete foundation to which this project will return as its final referent and judge. ...

I have ... confined my reflections to the preponderance of literature in the field, which supports the proposal that men, even if they are no more likely to strike their partner than are women, are far more likely to inflict harm and to intimidate their partner. I have also focused on male violence toward women within intimate relationships, because I have worked with these men. I believe that it is my role as a white male theologian to reflect on the potential for violation and reconciliation. I assume a decidedly pro-feminist orientation, which I believe is also pro-male, when I attempt to understand and ameliorate, if not eliminate, the violence that occurs through the hands of men on the people they claim to love.

The first step of the analysis is to engage the phenomenon of intimate violence itself in all its complexity and diversity and attempt, through a careful examination, to pull out of this phenomenon certain modes of relationality that are violated. For this reason, the analysis in the first chapters progresses from an extended reflection on the phenomenon of violence itself and specifically of intimate violence (chapter 1), through a reflection on the nature of violence and its cultural underpinnings (chapter 2), followed by a sociocultural analysis of the symbols of marriage, and reconciliation and the impact these symbols have on the lived experience of both perpetrator and survivor (chapter 3).

The second portion of the project occurs in two chapters that draw upon this phenomenology to reconstruct the doctrine of reconciliation in terms of "reconciliation," that is, a re-admission to the ecclesial community. Reconciliation focuses on a sense of primary relationality that is grounded in responsibility,

rather than a desire for reunion of those separated by the violence. Chapter 4 proposes that reconciliation may be understood as a deep symbol of the tradition. It holds in tension a call for unending responsibility and therefore a refusal of simple reunion, on the one hand, and a Christian demand for forgiveness and love that requires all to be reconciled to the ecclesial body, even if not to the violated partner, on the other. The book concludes with the application of the conclusions of chapter 4 into practical approaches to serving violent men both in the parish community and the larger society. ...