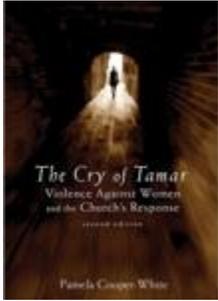


BOOK REVIEW: The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response

By **J Harold Ellens**, August 17, 2013



The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response, Pamela Cooper-White, second edition, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Pp 342 + x, 2012, Pb, \$23.15, ebook \$15.00. Reviewed by J. Harold Ellens Ph.D.

Pamela Cooper-White is the Ben G. and Nancy Clapp Cautier Professor of Pastoral Theology, Care, and Counseling at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. She has published a number of books with Fortress Press including *Shared Wisdom, Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (2004), and *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (2006). Her first edition of *The Cry of Tamar* was released in 1995. James Newton Poling observed that the first edition quickly became a standard text on gender justice in the churches. Nonetheless, the progress in local and global social activism to end sexist violence is slow and the epidemic is increasing by reason of backlash of religious patriarchalism. Thus this new edition is necessary and its reading is imperative for pastors and laity who are concerned for gender equality in Christian churches.

...this new edition is necessary and its reading is imperative for pastors and laity who are concerned for gender equality in Christian churches.

This lovely volume is comprehensive in scope and an articulately facile read. It is structured in three parts plus a Prologue that tells, retells from various perspectives, and analyses in fourteen pages The Rape of Tamar based upon the biblical narrative. The preface to the first edition is followed by a new introduction to the second edition, setting the work in a richly described contemporary context (23 pp). Then comes the aforementioned Prologue, followed by part one, the Framework of Violence Against Women. Even the chapter titles already give us a clear sense of what Cooper-White is up to: chapter one is entitled Power and Violence Against Women. Chapter two is on Images of Women: Pornography and the Connection to Violence.

Part two is entitled Forms of Violence Against Women, and has five chapters. They run successively from Sexual Harassment and Stalking, to Rape and Sexual Assault, Battering, Sexual Abuse by Clergy, and Sexual Abuse of Children. Part three, The Church's Response, is composed of The Pastor as "Wounded Healer," Ministry with Men Who Use Violence, and

Empowering Women. Finally, there follows the conclusion of ten pages, an appendix containing A Litany for Healing, then sixty-six pages of chapter notes, and a twelve-page index with 1,800 entries.

A vital resource for pastors, teachers, and clinicians.

Rosemary Radford Ruether says this is the best book she knows for bringing to the constructs and uses of biblical and theological reflection, as well as pastoral counseling, so large a scope of practical issues pertaining to violence, making it a vital resource for pastors, teachers, and clinicians. It will prompt the church to step up with courage to face the chronic violation of women, and offer the healing forces of faith and community for both survivors and perpetrators.

Cooper-White succinctly voices the epitome of this demanding work in her own words. “In the past few decades, the goal of care and counseling for victims of violence, whether in the form of community-based support groups, peer counseling and advocacy, pastoral care, or psychotherapy (depending on the level and nature of the particular injury) has been for the victim gradually to move from denial, to an acknowledgment of victimization, to an identity of ‘survivor.’ I would now add that she can even (eventually) move to a greater holistic sense of possibility for a multiple, creative blossoming of many selves within a larger sense of personal cohesion, agency, and purpose. As grief, fear and anger are processed in a safe setting she can be empowered to move forward in her life, no longer feeling controlled by her experience of trauma, but ‘strong at the broken places’” (13).

This volume points out that the cause of terminating violence against women must become a more thoroughly conscious and intentional crusade for justice because the issue is global and statistics now publicly known indicate that the tragedy is increasing rapidly. Fortunately the social sensitivity to the problem is also increasing. Public-awareness campaigns have grown, and formal institutionalization of the battle against abuse is increasing through United Nations’ initiatives, as well as due to the new focus of such institutions or movements as the Mission of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the YWCA, celebrity talk shows, and the special attention received in medical journals such as *Lancet* and *JAMA*.

This volume points out that the cause of terminating violence against women must become a more thoroughly conscious and intentional crusade for justice because the issue is global and statistics now publicly known indicate that the tragedy is increasing rapidly.

Moreover, in the last two decades new concepts and attitudes concerning victimization, identity, and gender are facilitating communication, openness, and the raising of both awareness and consciousness of the tragic abuse of women and children, and how urgently cultural values must change to rectify this social plague. This volume of pastoral literature is intentionally a work of advocacy and education. It does theology from the bottom up, as it should always have been done. As she states, “Pastoral praxis and the social and psychological theories undergirding that praxis are brought into dialogue with biblical exegesis and constructive theology. Human experience and, in particular, the experience of suffering, are starting points for pastoral and practical theology, as indeed, ... they should be for all theology” (21). The author’s method is inductive, based upon biblical and first-person narratives, as so long ago Boisen and Hiltner^[1] taught us it should be, and that Moltmann^[2] and others^[3] have more recently emphasized.

Cooper-White underscores throughout her work that the method and purpose of treatment, psychotherapeutic or pastoral, is properly focused upon consolation, reality orientation, and empowerment for women who have been or are being abused. Crisis intervention is usually the immediate response needed. The risk of suicide increases exponentially as the denial process is dismantled and reality orientation increases on the part of the victim of abuse. Simplistic pastoral-theological solutions are likely to trivialize the person and the process.

Crucial to healing are the following: (1) reducing the lethality of the damage, (2) increasing physical and psychological safety, (3) establishing calm reassurance that a course of action can help, and (4) repeating a coherent and courageous action plan.

Long-term recovery will be required for restoring the wholeness of the damaged person. The key to this is restructuring the shattered elements of the self so that the injured person can recover a sense of hope that feels well grounded and legitimate. Empowerment and healing are most likely to arise in the context of a caring, spiritual community where judgment does not arise, and where love is steady, dependable, and genuine. Progressively educating the injured individual is imperative, concerning the ways that health returns and functions in a damaged person, in how the wounds of the soul and of the moral essence as well as the psyche of a person can be healed over time, and finally in the steps of the process that signal progress and increased hope.

This is a valuable book, highly readable, intensely informative. If its author had not written it just as she did, somebody would urgently need to do so. We really need this volume, and for everyone in the caring and healing professions to read it.



J. Harold Ellens, a practicing psychotherapist, is a retired professor of philosophy, psychology, and classical studies, and a retired Presbyterian (PCUSA) minister and U.S. Army chaplain. He served for fifteen years as executive director of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies and as founding editor and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. He has a Ph.D. from Wayne State University in the Psychology of Human Communication, and a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in Biblical and Near Eastern Studies. Of his numerous books, the most recent include *Understanding Religious Experience* (2007), *Miracles: God, Science, and Psychology in the Paranormal* (2009), *The Spirituality of Sex* (2009), *The Son of Man in The Gospel of John* (2010), *The Healing Power of Spirituality, How Faith Helps Humans Thrive* (3 vols., 2010), *Honest Faith for Our Time: Truth Telling about the Bible, the Creed, and the Church* (2010), *Light from the Other Side: The Paranormal*

as *Friend and Familiar* (2010), and *Explaining Evil* (2011). His website is www.jharoldellens.com.

[1] J. Harold Ellens and David G. Benner, *Turning Points in Pastoral Care The Legacy of Anton Boisen and Seward Hiltner*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995.

[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, M. Kohl, tr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993 (1981).

[3] J. Harold Ellens, *Sin and Sickness: the Problem of Human Dysfunction, The Stob Lectures of 1997-98*, Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Theological Seminary. Republished as chapter 12 in *Seeking Understanding, The Stob Lectures 1986-1998*, pp 439-490, Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, 2001.

© 2013 J. Harold Ellens