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Editorial

CONSTANCE M. DORAN

Our world is a dangerous and violent place. The morning paper and the evening newscast assail us daily with stories of international terrorism and crime in our streets. Understandably, we may come to view our home and our family as the only safe haven — the only refuge in this threatening world. But for many people, their homes and their families are, in fact, the most dangerous of all environments.

Each year, almost 2 million American women are severely beaten by their husbands. And surprisingly, an appreciable number of husbands are battered by their wives. Approximately 1 million children are physically abused by their parents. Further, reports are beginning to surface that many elderly persons are abused by their adult children. Family violence, according to police statistics and research studies, may well be the most common crime in America.

It is, however, a crime that largely occurs in secret, behind closed doors. The victims often blame themselves for causing the violence, and fear retaliation if they seek outside help. Sociologists tell us that only 10 percent of family assaults are ever reported to the police and only 5 percent of the victims seek the help of mental health professionals. An even smaller number, a mere 3 percent, turn to their clergy for assistance.

Many victims report that when they do seek counseling and help, they are greeted with ignorance, indifference or outright hostility. “I tried to talk about this with my pastor but he seemed embarrassed and kept changing the subject,” is a typical comment. “We went to see a counselor and he kept saying that I must enjoy being beaten since I have stayed with my husband.”

In the past five years, I have talked with more than 500 battered persons, and none of them has ever said she enjoyed being beaten. What they have described is a nightmare from which they feel there is no escape. Ironically, the person who causes them so much pain is also a person they love and need. What victims are seeking is not an escape from that person, but an escape from his or her violence.

If we want to bring peace and healing to these tortured families, we must first remedy our own problems of ignorance. With that goal in mind, this issue of TN&N will examine several aspects of domestic violence.

After a consciousness-raising dialogue which defines and describes many of the complex dimensions of family violence, Dr. Paul Jewett presents an article on the cultural and theological attitudes which have permitted family violence to flourish. Professor of systematic theology at Fuller and author of Man as Male and Female, Dr. Jewett has for many years been concerned with the theological issues involved in the status of women in our society, and the relationship between men and women in the family. He brings to this task an unusual blend of respect for the authority of Scripture and sensitivity to the issues raised by the women’s movement today.
1. QUESTION: Let's try to define as precisely as possible what is meant by “family violence.” Bruises, welts and cuts are obvious signs of its occurrence, but what, in a legal sense, are the forms of this behavior?  

ANSWER: What generally has been labeled “family violence” describes behavior that is clearly illegal — misdemeanor or felony level assault. Family violence includes slapping, pushing, kicking, threatening with a knife or gun, choking or running over with a car. All these violent actions are, in fact, crimes. I think that's important for people to understand: these actions are crimes. We do not have the legal right to punch out, shoot, slap or shove members of our own family, just as we do not have the legal right to punch out, shoot, slap or shove members of the general population. The laws against assault and battery apply just as much in the family household as they do in the local bar on the street.

2. QUESTION: What is the incidence of domestic violence in our society?  

ANSWER: Sociologists began studying family violence only about 10 years ago, and a significant contribution to that study have been two surveys conducted in 1976 and 1979. In these surveys, a total of 4,000 families were interviewed. These were not persons who had come to the attention of the police or the courts; they were simply a random sample of the general public.

Using a legal definition of family violence, the survey reported that about one-fourth of American families engaged in at least one assault during their marriage. About 10 percent experienced this kind of behavior during the past year, and 4 percent said they were involved in violent assaults on a regular basis. Since there are about 50 million households in the United States, we can reasonably assume that 2 million households are the sites of violence on a regular basis. In some cases, these assaults may occur once a week.

3. QUESTION: What are some of the underlying causes of family violence? From your own experience as a counselor with both abusers and victims, why do people commit violent acts against their own family members — persons they supposedly love?  

ANSWER: We don't really understand domestic violence very well. We don't know what causes it and we don't fully understand what can stop it. We need to do much consistent research, but it is difficult to gain access over an extended period of time to violent families.

We can describe factors which can be interpreted as “risks” to the incidence of domestic violence, but we cannot assume that these “risks” are “causal” factors. Sociological studies show that domestic violence occurs in every racial group and in every socio-economic group but that the incidence is significantly higher in poor families, racial minority families, young families and urban families. All of these families are, in fact, under the most socio-economic stress. We also know that unemployment is another strong risk factor. Research shows that with every one percent rise in unemployment, there is a jump in the number of child abuse reports, family trauma cases reported in hospital emergency rooms and police calls for domestic intervention. We know that handicapped persons are also at great risk of abuse and that's not a pleasant thing to learn about our species. We are physically assaultive of people who are already physically handicapped — both children and adults.

There is a lot of research that shows that family violence is a learned behavior. A high percentage of batterers were raised in violent families, so this is the way they have been taught to resolve conflict.

Then, from my own counseling experience — and this is not supported by research or statistics — I have heard over and over from batterers one central reason why they commit violence: It makes them feel better. Immediately. It is a short-term way of relieving stress that has a very powerful “high” attached to it. Violence, they say, is very much like taking a hit of heroin. The negative aspects of the violence, which will probably be slight, won't develop for months or perhaps years down the road. But in just 30 seconds of beating up a child or spouse, the batterer has released a lot of personal stress.

Also for many couples, physical violence is a way to relieve still another source of tension — sexual anxiety. Violence, in fact, is often a substitute for sexual intimacy or perhaps a defense against it. Many couples report that violence is triggered not by an argument but by some intensely intimate experience: a tender sexual experience, an intimate family occasion, an anniversary, birthday or family holiday. It's as though that kind of family intimacy or pleasure isn't deserved and has to be minimized or
It is important that family violence cases are prosecuted simply to portray in a forceful way that our society believes this kind of behavior is wrong.

denigrated or distanced very quickly by a violent act. Many of these violent couples have a high level of sexual dysfunction and are uncomfortable with many forms of intimacy. For them, violence is the most intimate experience of their relationship and the period in which they feel the most alive and turned on. With counseling, they can learn other ways — non-violent, non-abusive ways — of feeling close to another person.

4. QUESTION: “Family violence” is a big issue these days. We read about it in newspapers and hear about it on radio and television. Is family violence somehow unique to our culture and our point in history?

ANSWER: From historical records, we know that family violence has been a commonplace occurrence throughout the centuries. As far back as the Code of Hammurabi, domestic violence has been recorded, described and explicitly permitted. The father of the household was specifically given permission to discipline his family — his wife, children and servants — in any fashion he saw fit, including the right of capital punishment. By the Middle Ages there were some limits to this power, such as the famous “rule of thumb” in English common law which said that a man could beat his wife with anything as long as it were no thicker than his thumb. In our own legal system, as late as 1910, a U.S. Supreme Court decision affirmed a lower court ruling that a man could not be charged with assault and battery for beating his own wife. Today, most states have fairly well-defined laws against violence on the books, but regrettably the laws are rarely enforced when the violence occurs within the family.

5. QUESTION: Why aren't laws against family violence enforced and abusers prevented from continuing their violent behavior?

ANSWER: An underlying reason is that domestic violence is not viewed as a very serious problem in our society. I believe that one of the things which permits domestic violence to flourish is the fact that it's given tacit permission. When I interview batterers, they have a common attitude that they haven't done anything wrong. It is important from an ethical point of view that family violence cases are prosecuted simply to portray in a forceful way that our society believes this kind of behavior is wrong. We need to say we will not accept it. Family violence is evil.

And from a more practical point of view, criminal prosecution is almost essential in getting the aggressor into some kind of treatment program. But, in general, the criminal justice system involvement in the prosecution of these cases has not been very effective. Part of the reason for that is the magnitude of the problem. A recent study conducted by the Los Angeles City Police Department found that 35 percent of their time was devoted to responding to domestic violence calls. A second problem in prosecuting these cases is that there are most often no witnesses. Third, a lot of women interviewed by counselors and psychologists report that calling the police or getting involved in prosecution has made the violence worse or has simply caused further abuse by indifferent and uncaring law enforcement people. Fourth, the victims themselves are sometimes ambivalent about prosecuting the abuser, whom they may fear and yet have to depend upon for economic and emotional support. So, because of all these factors, prosecutors have had a very poor record of getting the victim to persist in prosecution. The average dropout rate in most prosecutors' jurisdictions is 99 percent.

There are, however, a few model programs which have dramatically improved the criminal handling of family violence cases. For example, two years ago, the city attorney's office in Los Angeles, which prosecutes many domestic violence cases, began to take responsibility for pressing charges against the batterer. That relieved the victim from the burden of making the decision to take immediate action as well as enduring the generally long, complicated process of a court case. Other innovative programs, such as those in King County in Seattle and in Santa Barbara, Calif. also have programs which encourage the victim to prosecute. At the same time, the victim is given emotional support, shelter and counseling services. As a result, in these jurisdictions, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of victims willing to proceed with the prosecution of these domestic violence cases.
6. QUESTION: Since the legal options are not always available or utilized by battered women, how effective are community resources such as halfway houses or shelters?

ANSWER: The shelter movement arose in the mid-1970's out of the awareness that legal intervention was never going to provide the ultimate solution to the problems of domestic violence. Unlike the sometimes complex and typically lengthy legal options, shelters provide immediate and necessary resources for battered women: safety, support and strength while they figure out and develop their future plans.

In Pasadena we have Haven House, the oldest shelter for battered women in the world. It was started in 1964 by Al-Anon, which is a support group for alcoholics — alcoholism, by the way, is often the trigger for violent behavior. From a single house, shelters for abused women now number more than 400 across the country. The shelters generally provide 30-day stays for women and their children. Before these shelters were established, there were literally no places where women and children could go that didn't charge regular motel or hotel fees. As a rule, shelters also provide counseling services.

7. QUESTION: Is family violence strictly and simply a case of men against women and children?

ANSWER: This is a controversial issue. In the 1976 survey, both men and women were interviewed about their particular strategies for resolving family problems. Persons were asked a series of specific questions: Do you sit down and settle conflicts by rational discussions? Do you throw things? Do you slap or shove? Do you punch, kick, knife, shoot or choke? Do you threaten to drive over your spouse with a car? The results of the study showed that at the lower levels of violence — up to beating with fists — women were reported by both men and women to engage in these behaviors more than males. This was surprising information, because, in general, we've thought that women would rarely engage in slapping or throwing things or hitting people over the heads with frying pans, but apparently this behavior is fairly common. Very often, however, after an act of lower level aggression, men will respond with a much more serious attack resulting in the spouse's injury. We know this is a fact because about 99 percent of the victims seen in emergency rooms or by police are women.

8. QUESTION: What role do victims play in family violence? Why do victims stay in abusive relationships?

ANSWER: The first response of most people observing these kinds of relationships is to say to the victim: "You should leave. Why do you put up with that? I certainly wouldn't."

There's been a lot of speculation and some research on why victims stay. Certainly one of the reasons is that in many parts of our culture, violence is not regarded as "wrong" behavior. I think that is particularly true for women who were raised in families where they were exposed to a lot of violence. Therefore, they don't see this as anything abnormal. A second reason victims stay in an abusive relationship is because of their economic dependency. Women still make only about 60 percent as much as men make in almost all occupational categories. A third reason, I believe, is the fact that many women are unaware of their options: legal remedies, shelters, counseling programs and other services in the community.

There are also some internal or psychological reasons why victims stay in these relationships. One of these reasons has been described by psychologist Lenore Walker as "learned helplessness." Some abused women are so passive — so paralyzed — that they are hardly aware of what is happening to them. This kind of behavior is widely seen among all groups of people who have been victims of random, unpredictable and uncontrollable violence. It's seen in concentration camp victims, World War II, North Korean and Viet Nam prisoners of war. Victims tend to minimize the violence and even begin to defend their captors. It's normal for them to keep a low profile and try to disturb the abusers as little as possible — such behavior is quite similar to that exhibited by the victims of domestic violence.
No amount of marriage counseling is going to make a marriage better ... as long as violence remains for the abuser a comfortable and habitual way of resolving conflict and releasing tension.

At another dimension, there are many women who seem to be acclimated to violence — "violence-prone thrill seekers," as Erin Pizzey, an English shelter worker, has described them. They are so accustomed to a high level of violence — with an atmosphere of police sirens and ambulances — that they describe themselves as being bored when they are away from that environment.

A third group of women I have interviewed are the "missionaries." These women are active, successful, have lots of friends and are often participants in organizations such as the church. They may be economically successful and may even support their husbands. Generally, they know their legal rights and may seek counseling on ways to help their husband control his problem. In counseling, they say they will reform their husbands "if it kills me." Their goal seems admirable: to remain the long-suffering martyr in the hope that the violent husband will eventually overcome his behavior. I think the flaw in this tactic is that very often this "martyr's" behavior actually reinforces the abuser's violent behavior. To look at it from a learning point of view, the victim is rewarding the abuser for the violence, not only in appeasing him but also in actively intervening for him and preventing him from experiencing the natural consequences of his violence.

9. QUESTION: How can counseling and the counseling process be most effective in helping victims and abusers prevent family violence? Does such counseling work? Do people change? Do couples come back together?

ANSWER: In the therapy process, violence needs to be treated as a specialized, primary problem. No amount of marriage counseling is going to make a marriage better in any fundamental way as long as violence remains for the abuser a comfortable and habitual way of resolving conflict and releasing tension. No research has actually been published on the effectiveness of outpatient services, yet from anecdotal reports, women say that the counseling they have received has sometimes made the violence worse. Very often, they report, the counselor blamed the victim for the incidence of violence, asking her, "Don't you enjoy being beaten?" or "What did you do to provoke him?"

This kind of ignorance on the part of counselors is easily understood if you look at the curriculum for most graduate programs in psychology and counseling. They provide virtually no training for mental health professionals on domestic violence treatment. This fact partially explains why so few counselors have genuine experience and interest in this problem. Most mental health professionals simply haven't seen enough cases to develop much expertise.

Another factor which works against effective treatment is the fact that it's very tough to keep families in treatment long enough to see much change. Typically, an abuser drops out of treatment after only one or two sessions as he feels anxiety and discomfort when he is confronted by his abusive problems. But in those cases in which therapy can be maintained over a longer period, the prognosis is really very good.

10. QUESTION: Family violence touches not only spouses, but children and older persons as well. What are some of the common problems that underlie the abuse of these groups of people? What kinds of services and programs are available to abused children and elderly?

ANSWER: In many ways, child abuse is the area of domestic violence which has received the most attention. This kind of violence has been talked about in professional circles for a long time and laws have been passed in almost every state which make it mandatory for doctors, teachers, therapists and so on to report any suspicious injuries to children. As a result of this attention and state laws, there has been much more criminal prosecution and research into child abuse than assaults on the elderly.
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From the research, we see no indication of any single psychological profile of people who are abusive of their children. As in the case of spousal abuse, however, we find that the incidence of abuse is higher among families which have a child who is ill or has special needs. Recognizing this, many agencies and organizations provide special services to families with the risk of child abuse. For example, some neo-natal units in pediatric hospitals provide counseling for the parents of children who have gone through hospital services.

But a problem with responding to the increasing demand for service, is the fact that the number of services has declined because of overall budget cutbacks. Poor people simply cannot afford to go to private child psychologists and pay $50 to $60 for an hour's counseling. One alternative to this is a program called Parents Anonymous. It was started by an abusive parent and her therapist. They set up what has become a very successful organization, modeled in large part after Alcoholics Anonymous.

There is also an organization for parents who are involved in the sexual abuse of children called Parents United. It too has chapters throughout the United States. Similar in structure to Parents Anonymous, it makes available trained mental health professionals to serve as resource persons and provide specialized counseling. Both of these organizations will undoubtedly become increasingly important as tax dollars are withdrawn from some of the professional agencies.

In terms of problems of the abuse of the elderly, there are far fewer services available. And, in fact, there is very little research that has been done in this area. Yet most organizations that operate hotlines get many calls from seniors who are being abused by their children.

You also hear from single parents who are beaten by an adolescent son or daughter. Parents find this difficult to admit. It's very hard for them to take any action at all, especially to seek counseling. Commonly these parents blame the victims—themselves. "I should have raised my kids differently. It's really my fault so I don't want to do anything that would expose, hurt or embarrass my child. I'll just suffer."

**11. QUESTION:** What would you recommend as a program to help eliminate domestic violence? What kinds of commitment are needed from individuals as well as society?

**ANSWER:** First, as I've pointed out, we need more research to better understand the causes and treatment of domestic violence. We need to have more skilled counselors, and that takes more specialized academic and clinical training.

Then we need to consider the whole range of community services. We need to educate not only therapists, but also persons in the criminal justice system. Police officers in particular need to have more in-depth understanding of domestic violence problems. Prosecutors and judges need to be educated to handle domestic violence cases in a more responsible fashion and give more appropriate sentences. Their sentencing should almost always involve an order for therapy, not simply probation which is currently the norm. Judges must recognize that aggressors in any kind of deviant social behavior very rarely present themselves for treatment.

Community education must also reach emergency hospital personnel. They need to be able to effectively diagnose the signs of spousal abuse in much the same way that they diagnose the incidence of rape and child abuse.

On another very important level, we need to educate communities to support their services for domestic violence victims. In the past two years, there has been a dramatic reduction in the amount of federal money available to support shelters and child abuse treatment centers. If community support programs are going to survive, they must receive sufficient support from the local community. It is therefore of the utmost importance that elected representatives of the people, at whatever level, are made aware of the seriousness of family violence and of the services needed to reduce and control it.

Theological Issues in Domestic Violence

PAUL KING JEWETT

Paul King Jewett, professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary since 1955, received Th.B. and Th.M. degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary and the Ph.D. degree from Harvard University. He also has studied in Switzerland at the University of Berne, the University of Zurich and the University of Basel; and in France, at the Catholic Institute of Paris and the University of Paris. The author of numerous articles for religious publications, he also has written several books, including Man as Male and Female, Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace and The Ordination of Women.

Of the many messages proclaimed on bumper stickers — those ubiquitous pulsits — one recently caught my attention as I idled at a stop light: “Soccer Back!” This issue of TN&N is devoted to domestic violence, a form of violence involving both men and women. But in reading the literature, one soon sees — as the bumper sticker reminds us — that “domestic violence” translates into “battered women.” While both men and women are involved in the violence, generally men are the perpetrators, women the victims.

When one listens to the careful discussions of what it means to be a “battered” woman, one discovers that it means quite literally what the Oxford English Dictionary says it means. To batter is “to strike with repeated blows,” “to beat out of shape,” “to bruise,” “to shatter.” As a military term it means “to operate against walls and fortifications with artillery with the result that they are broken down and demolished as with a battering ram.” Hence, when the subject is a person, to batter her is “to subject (her) to heavy, crushing persistent attack.” So the meaning of the term and the appropriateness of its use in the literature are quite indisputable.

There are other facets of the issue which are sufficiently indisputable as to command a broad consensus, namely:

1) Domestic violence is much more widespread than is generally acknowledged because the evidence has been hidden from view by the embarrassment and fear of reprisal that the victims feel and by the sanctity of the home which surrounds the family with an inviolable privacy.

2) The home, far from being the battered woman’s shelter from the storms of a larger society, is rather the maelstrom of that violence which threatens to destroy her. How shall she escape? Where shall she go if she is not safe in her own home? These are not hysterical outbursts of some bleeding hearts but sober questions which cannot be ignored.

3) This violence in the home is the matrix of other forms of social violence. There is a definite correlation between the violence experienced within the home as children are growing up — a violence which they suffer and which they witness — and the increasing violence in society as a whole. (Lee Harvey Oswald, Sirhan Sirhan and Charles Manson all experienced violent childhoods.)

4) This violence cuts across all social, economic and religious lines. Women — some poor, some affluent, some educated, some uneducated, some religious, some non-religious — suffer violence at the hands of men, both physical and emotional.

5) The physical abuse of women is part of a larger problem. As an overt instance of violence, it goes hand in hand with a pervasive, covert, institutionalized violence against women, a violence which curtails their freedom to be persons in their own right by circumscribing their role in society.

6) Domestic violence which is ultimately mysterious in its character (all forms of moral evil defy ultimate explanation) has many proximate causes. One of these, if not theological in nature, is theological at least in implication. It may be succinctly put as follows: Battering husbands view the marriage license as a license to violence. Why should this be? It is to this last consideration and the questions it evokes that I wish to turn our attention.

Whether one puts the emphasis on nature or nurture in explaining human behavior, everyone agrees that nurture — the environment in which one grows up — has something to do with the violent behavior of the man who physically and psychologically abuses the woman with whom he lives. In other words, domestic violence in some sense is learned behavior; it reflects the kind of person the batterer has become as the result of the circumstances which have shaped his life. In specific cases one may discern this or that specific contributing factor — addiction to alcohol, the frustration of chronic unemployment, jealousy of real or imagined rivals, a deep sense of personal insecurity — but such considerations do not get at the root of the matter. There are husbands who don’t drink, who earn piles of money, who evidence no pangs of jealousy, and who seem to suffer no sense of insecurity yet still lay violent hands on their wives.

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When we ask why this is so, we are driven back to more universal considerations, one of which, at least, has to do with Christian theology. I refer to sexual hierarchy, the view that the man is over the woman and the woman subordinate to the man, especially in the husband-wife relationship. Those who listen most to the stories told by battered women and talk most to the men who batter them, testify that the bottom line is the place of authority over the woman which society has assigned the man and taught him to claim and exercise in the name of his masculinity.

Here certain points need to be stated in the interest of clarity.

1) Not every man — by any stretch of the imagination — who advocates sexual hierarchy, beats his wife or approves of those who do. But this affirmation cannot be reversed. Research has plainly shown that men who batter their wives embrace the traditional view of male supremacy. Indeed, most battered women who marry such men also believe “the woman’s place is in the home” and if they do have jobs outside the home, they still believe their income belongs their husbands and defer to his judgment as to how it is to be spent.

2) The abuses related to sexual hierarchy (patriarchalism) are found in many cultures and are by no means to be understood wholly in terms of a specifically religious, much less Christian, perspective. Chinese women have been cuffed for centuries by foot-binding and in many Muslim countries even today women are secluded from male society, prisoners, as it were, in their own homes and non-persons behind their veils when they venture out.

3) Nonetheless, the form of sexual hierarchy (patriarchalism) that is defended and practiced in contemporary American society does contain in many instances a definite Christian component — Christian, that is, in the sense that those who defend it as the divine will for the husband/wife relationship do so as confessing Christians. As Lenore Walker has observed, those who “are most overt in denying any help to the woman are the conservative fundamentalists and some orders of Catholicism.” This “Christian” component, as I have called it, should be placed in quotes, in my judgment, for much that goes by that name is of dubious pedigree.

“I am a Christian,” says Phyllis Schlafly, “and all good Christians believe that women are special and that God made men to take care of women . . . and make sure nobody else messes with them.”

“A direct ramification of the ERA,” she continues, “would be that women will stop having children.” Such women should “forfeit Social Security benefits, even if they have worked all their lives. If they are not willing to have children . . . then they shouldn’t be entitled to Social Security.”

Televangelist Charles Stanley, leading spokesman for the “pro-family” movement and one of Moral Majority Inc.’s five board members, declares: “There is a vicious, all-out, Satanic attack on the American home — the whole concept of anti-submission and independence . . . When two people in the family become absolutely legally equal, there is no head; both become independent of each other and love is destroyed.”

These spokespersons for the “pro-family” movement have as one of the planks in their platform the weakening of spouse abuse laws. Already, Moral Majority of Indiana has successfully weakened the state’s child abuse law, a “reform” that was needed, according to Greg Dixon, head of the state chapter, because “the Bible instructs parents to whip their children with a rod . . . Welts and bruises are a sign that a parent is doing a good job of discipline.”

“Pro-family” advocates, of course, can cite no chapter and verse that says a husband should deal out the same discipline to his wife; but, as we noted, they are against the laws that would curb such activity. JoAnn Gasper, the former head of a group called “The Right Woman,” sees no need for such laws because the very concept of domestic violence is so vague it can mean “any form of ‘belittling’ or ‘teasing’ or ‘failure to provide warmth’ (whatever that may be — I guess if you don’t set the electric blanket high enough in the winter) or ‘excessive yelling.’” Wives: 90% of the Fault is the title of a “pro-family” tract by Roy and Elizabeth Rood in which they declare that women can attain Christian fulfillment only if they “submit to their husbands in everything (especially sexual love) . . .”

These Christians who would “save” the family by trivializing domestic violence and crusading against tax-supported programs that help battered women, counsel such women, even when they have been hospitalized, to submit to their husbands. As husbands are answerable to God, they say, so wives are answerable to their husbands. By submitting, women learn what it means to “suffer for righteousness sake” (Gotheard). They must remember that
But there is really a more ultimate theological question: Is patriarchalism (sexual hierarchy) clearly revealed in Scripture as God’s will for the family?

Scripture (Eph. 5:33) does not say that the wife should "reverence her husband if he deserves to be reverenced" (C. Narramore).⁶

Obviously — at least it seems so to me — there is something wrong with this fundamentalistic use of Scripture. True, the text in Ephesians 5:33, which admonishes wives to reverence their husbands, is without express qualification. But the same epistle (Eph. 6:5) also admonishes slaves to obey their masters without express qualification. In fact, I Peter 2:18 injunctions submission not only to the "good" but also to the "surly" ("froward," "wicked," "perverse") master. Are these "pro-family" people also "pro-slavery" because of what these Scriptures teach?

In any case, in antebellum America the "moral majority" of that day (who lived below the Mason-Dixon Line — and some who lived above it) made sure that slaves heeded the scriptural admonition to obedience. But how could the God of the oppressed, the God who made those who were no people (slaves of Pharaoh) His people by bringing them out of the house of bondage, also be the God who sanctioned slavery? The answer is that He could not, and in due time He visited America, loosing "the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword."

The case of battered women is analogous to that of the slaves and confronts us with a similar question: Why should such women have no recourse when their husbands abuse them? How can the God who has likened the covenant of marriage to the covenant He has established with His people understand the marriage covenant as giving one part the right to destroy the other? Is not God’s covenant a covenant of love? Does it not have as its purpose to redeem, to bless and to fulfill all those who are covenantees? Surely there is only one answer Christians can give to these questions.

Yet many who would answer this question affirmatively wish to qualify their "yes" with a "but" when it comes to the marriage covenant. Yes, they say, the marriage covenant is a covenant of love and the husband ought to love his wife even as Christ loves the church, but God has made the husband the head of the church (I Cor. 11:3). Suppose, for the sake of argument, that this is so. By what reasoning may one conclude that the husband can break the marriage covenant (which he sealed with a vow of love) whereas she is still bound by that covenant to reverence and submit to him? Why is she bound when he is not?

Those who believe in the headship of the man answer that the man stands in the place of God. Now in this world there is, indeed, a sense in which the human creature may stand in the place of God. Humankind, for example, is given dominion over the other orders of creation as God’s stewards (Gen. 1:28). The (all too human) kings of Israel, to give another example, ruled for God as the anointed of the Lord in the theocratic kingdom of Israel. And in many Christian lands, after the analogy of biblical theocracy, kings and queens were believed to have a "divine right" to rule over their subjects. But this was no absolute right, and those kings and queens who confused themselves with God were often brought down by rebellious subjects. In one case especially, the American Revolution of 1776, Moral Majoritarians would have no doubt that the outcome was consonant in every way with the will of God. How then, to return to our ad hominem argument, can they teach that women should submit to their husbands under all circumstances?

But there is really a more ultimate theological question: Is patriarchalism (sexual hierarchy) clearly revealed in Scripture as God’s will for the family? We are not asking does Scripture reflect a patriarchal society? Obviously it does, especially in the Old Testament. Indeed in Scripture many things are "reflected", but the reflection is that of the culture in which the revelation is given, not the revelation itself. The cities of refuge (Josh. 20:2f.), for example, are a revelation, for they are cities of refuge and God is our Refuge, a very present Help in time of trouble (Ps. 46:1). But they are also a culturally conditioned revelation, for they are cities of refuge from the avenger of blood. Surely God’s justice is not the irrational vengeance of the lex talionis.

Likewise, we would suggest, when we turn to the patriarchal structure of the family, matters are not as simple as some would make them. The traditional basis of the doctrine of the woman’s submission to the man has been the creation narrative (Gen. 2:18-23) which speaks of her creation from the man. But there is nothing in the order of creation (male first, female second) that implies subordination. (In fact, the male was created after the animals but is not subordinate to them.) The woman is described in Genesis as the "helper fit for
him," the preposition meaning "corresponding to," "equal and adequate to." She is the "help of his like," to translate literally, or, to paraphrase in the words of Delitzsch, she is a "helping being, in whom, as soon as he sees her, the man recognizes himself." We can only conclude then, that when the narrative in Genesis 2 speaks of the woman as made from the man, the intent is to distinguish her from the animals by implying her essential likeness to the one from whom she is taken. Her superiority over the animals, not her inferiority to the man, is the fundamental thought. The creation ordinance, in other words, is one of mutual complementarity of the sexes, a partnership—not a hierarchy—of male and female.

This is the way Jesus understood the relationship of the sexes, if we are to judge from the manner in which he related to women. In fact, the presence and place of women in Jesus' mission and the way he related to them was unprecedented for the day in which he lived. He fellowshipped with the women who were his disciples as with the men, and he always treated them on an equal footing with men. It was to these women, who lamented him along the Via Dolorosa and came early to his tomb, that he first revealed himself as the risen Lord. Between Jesus' attitude toward women and that of the present day "Moral Majority," there is such a fixed gulf that one sometimes wonders how the latter can describe themselves as they do.

Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that to heal the brokenness of the family, tragically symbolized in the battered woman, we need to hear and heed the liberating message which comes to us from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. One who profoundly understood that message was led by the Spirit to say that for those who are in Christ "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28).

FOOTNOTES

1. Of course nothing is literally indisputable. The Flat Earth Society disputes the spherical shape of the planet and there are vociferous claims that the Holocaust never happened. Learned disquisitions seek to prove that Shakespeare never wrote a play, and those of us who live in theological seminaries know of books taking up space on the library shelf that deny the existence of Jesus.

2. The National Institute of Mental Health in 1979 estimated that there was some form of violence in 60 percent of all families, and that wife-beating is 10 times more under-reported than rape. As for the privacy factor, note the title of Erin Pizzey's pioneering study, Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear (London, 1974).

3. It also cuts across lines some of us might not suspect. I confess my own amazement when a group of theological students met at our home for an evening of socializing, one with scratched face and sans wife. When I called on her the next day, her eyes were still swollen and her bruised face still blue. "I decided," she said, "that for once I would put a mark on him!"


5. The above "pro-family" quotations are from the "Special Report" of the Quarterly Report of People for the American Way, January 1982, pp. 3-4. From the time of the Code of Hammurabi, it has been assumed that it is the man's prerogative as husband, father and master to discipline his wife, children and servants. Most laws in more modern times do not challenge the right, but seek only to curb the abuse with which the right is exercised. In 1910, the United States Supreme Court gave the traditional view tacit sanction by handing down the opinion that what happens behind the closed doors of the home belongs to the privacy of the family and therefore is not a basis of legal prosecution. This interpretation of the law, made by men and protecting men, is currently being challenged in the United States. The challenge, however, has evoked the "pro-family" counter challenge. The New Right has consistently fought legislation to provide and fund shelters for battered women. The Office of Domestic Violence, established under the Carter administration, has already been eliminated. Such programs and shelters, it is argued, foster divorce and the disintegration of the family.

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Psycho-
logical
Issues in
Counseling
Batterers

SHARON SWEENEY
L. JOHN KEY

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EPIDEMIOLOGY

Touching the lives of millions of Americans, family violence is now recognized as an urgent social problem. According to research (Steinmetz and Straus, 1973), an estimated 50 to 60 percent of the nation's 47 million couples have experienced at least one violent incident, and 10 to 25 percent suffer violence as a common occurrence. At least half of the women seeking divorces say they were beaten repeatedly during their marriages.

Various studies of wife battering indicate that about 85 percent of the men who batter and 30 percent of the women who are victims grew up in violent homes (Gelles, 1974; Steinmetz and Straus, 1974; Walker, 1979).

Still other research on the roots of family violence shows that 80 to 90 percent of convicted felons in prison either were abused as children or grew up in homes where they witnessed violence. Further, 63 percent of the young men between ages 11 and 20 who are incarcerated in California prisons for homicide killed their mother's batterer.

The numerous victims of family violence are also apparent from the statistics of community agencies set up to respond to those problems in three Southern California counties: Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside. In 1980, these agencies handled more than 31,000 crisis calls and provided shelter for 1,100 battered women and 1,600 children.

In Los Angeles County alone, domestic violence-related homicides claimed 126 victims in the first six months of 1982, according to L.A. County's district attorney's office. Locally, in Pasadena, California, a city with a population of 119,000, the police department's Domestic Violence Team reported 75 cases of spousal abuse during a three-month period in 1981.

To look at the causes, circumstances, and possible prevention of family violence, the Center for Abusive Behavior, a private practice in Pasadena, collected data for more than one year on a total of 44 batterers. They ranged in age from 21 to 67, with an average age of 35. The batterers came from different races, and a range of socio-economic classes and occupations. All but six were employed, and their occupations included postal carrier, certified public accountant, police officer, car wash employee, teacher, bartender, lawyer, engineer and minister. Of these men, 17 were referred by the probation department, and the rest were either self-referred or referred by community agencies. Half of the men had been abused as children, and 35 percent identified either their father, grandfather or brother as also being an abuser. Forty percent had a previous encounter with the criminal justice system for assultive or other anti-social behavior. One-third were alcohol abusers.

TOWARD A WORKING TYPOLOGY OF BATTERERS

There has not been any comprehensive research on this special population, because, until recently, there were almost no counselors or agencies willing or equipped to treat the batterer. Therefore, the data base for the kind of man who beats his wife tends to come not from the batterer himself, but from those involved as victims or helpers of the victims.

The batterer is described by the victim as having low self-esteem, denying and minimizing the degree and extent of the violence, demonstrating excessive possessiveness, jealousy and verbal abuse, and having traditional views of male and female role orientation. Further, the batterer generally has a history of being abused as a child himself.

From clinical interviews at the Center for Abusive Behavior, from the administration of a personality inventory questionnaire, and weekly summaries from "anger" diaries of the batterers, there is a recognizable constellation of attitudes, beliefs and emotional patterns common to those men who abuse their wives or have the poten-
tial to do so. Specifically, batterers tend to differ from the average male population on two personality characteristics. Batterers appear to be serious or sober and possibly dour and sometimes unimaginative. They are concerned about detail and are sometimes unimaginative. The majority have an external rather than an internal locus of control orientation.

The typology developed from the research suggests three sub-types of batterers: 1) Infrequent batterers (once every three or four months), 2) Frequent batterers (weekly), and 3) Mixed-type batterers (varying).

The infrequent batterer is rigidly inhibited by everything and everybody. He rarely responds with anger and aggression no matter how great the provocation. Yet, he is unable to use the mechanics of displacement or response generalization and becomes abusive when his violent tendencies exceed his defenses.

The frequent batterers make up the majority of the batterers in the sample. They tend to respond with anger and aggression whenever frustrated.

Mixed-type batterers suffer some degree of frustration and their treatment may be as simple as identifying the source of frustration and learning new social skills.

In addition, all types of batterers tend to justify their abusive behavior by minimizing and denying the extent of the battering. (This is consistent with data collected by others.) By minimizing the abuse, the batterer relieves himself of the responsibility of his behavior and the necessity of changing himself. Also, by denying the extent of the battering, the client is able to ward off periods of depression and suicidal thoughts.

This typology based on our research has its limitations, but it does offer a viable alternative to the practice of putting all batterers in one classification, treating them all the same, and believing that all abuse stems from the same stimulus.

For treatment procedures, it is crucial to know whether a batterer is a frequent or infrequent abuser. The frequent abuser needs to slow down and learn to not respond to stimuli which elicit aggression, whereas the infrequent batterer needs to be taught that he can respond appropriately to stimuli and not internalize his feelings and explode later. Also, if a client is on alcohol or drugs, he is encouraged to get detoxified and become actively involved in an Alcoholics Anonymous program before seeking help through this program for batterers.

THE THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE
As already pointed out, batterers tend to either deny, minimize or forget the violence they inflict upon their spouse. Further, batterers in general do not seek treatment on their own volition, but only upon the prodding of their wife or girlfriend, employer, clergy or the district attorney's office.

Upon entering treatment, the batterer often feels angrily justified in his hostile actions, defensive about his problem and resistant toward therapy. It is difficult for him to give up a repertoire of behavior for which he has received intermittent reinforcement and about which he may feel pride. His environment is an American culture which rewards and values aggressive heroes and views violence as a problem solver. For all of these reasons, a therapeutic relationship is difficult to establish with most batterers.

To start to build a successful treatment relationship, however, a therapist must first deal with his or her own fears, anxieties, and repressed — or not so repressed — anger brought about by the client's hostility toward treatment and potential for acting out aggressive impulses. The fears and anxiety of the therapist can activate countertransference feelings that can interfere with the neutrality needed for a therapeutic alliance. Fear, in fact, may permeate the setting to such an extent that effective psychological intervention becomes impossible.

To avoid that situation, the therapist must take a constructive, non-judgmental stance at the beginning of the interview. The therapist must be non-judgmental toward the batterer as a person yet judgmental about his abusive behavior and the effects of that behavior on the victim. The batterer must be reminded that he is responsible for his own behavior, yet at the same time, encouraged and supported as he attempts to assume this responsibility.

A successful therapeutic relationship can help a client realize perhaps for the first time in his life that he can control his anger and impulsive behavior.

The treatment approach that follows is applicable to male batterers with histories of frequent or infrequent battering. While the sample was small, the current follow-up data suggest the positive potential for broad-based behavioral change. It is, obviously, of paramount importance that the
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**THE BEGINNING PHASE OF TREATMENT — INITIAL ASSESSMENT**

During the first session, according to the model used by the Center for Abusive Behavior, the therapist inquires about the most recent occurrence of assaultive behavior and listens for cues that indicate the violent style of the client and the factors that trigger abusive behavior. What are the physiological indicators that let the client know he is about to become physical? Does he, for example, clinch his fist, grit his teeth, get red in the face or feel his stomach turn as he becomes angry? What is the frequency of these triggering behaviors? What is the duration of the anger? How often do the initial signs of anger become intense enough to cause physical assaults? What are the circumstances surrounding the anger and battering — money crises, alcohol problems or family pressures? Finally, in what environments does the batterer demonstrate impulse control problems — at work, social events, the home?

After the initial session, the client is asked to complete an "anger" diary of each incident of anger that he experiences during the week. The diary should focus on the circumstances that trigger the anger, the intensity and duration of the anger, the thoughts that the client has while angry, and the physiological signs of the anger. The purpose of this task is to break down the angry behavior into small manageable steps.

If the batterer and his spouse are living together, it is essential for the client to stop the violence as soon as possible. Because feelings register in the body much sooner than in the head or brain, the client should be taught to cue into the physical signs of his anger — muscle tension, aggressive feelings, etc. — so he can use the cues as an early warning system for himself and others. The cue, or signal, can be relayed either verbally or non-verbally. The batterer can learn to say, "I am too angry now to talk," or he can use a time-out signal to alert the spouse. The victim must mutually agree to this tactic and realize that the client must immediately leave the angry situation to avoid a violent confrontation.

After the client has learned what circumstances trigger his abusive behavior and how to cue into the physical signs of his anger, he should be encouraged to learn preventive exercise techniques to reduce his stress level. One effective calming exercise is deep breathing, which can initially be learned in the setting of a home or counseling office. The client should be taught to lie down on a rug on the floor with his spine straight and his knees bent and feet slightly apart. The client should place one hand on the abdomen and one hand on the chest as he inhales slowly and deeply. When the client feels at ease, he should inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth and make a quiet, relaxing "whooshing" sound as he gently blows out. This deep breathing should continue for about five minutes, once or twice a day, for a couple of weeks. Gradually, the client should be encouraged to practice deep breathing exercises during the day — sitting or standing — whenever he is tense.

The client must also learn to listen to what he says to himself before, during and after an anger situation. This silent monologue has been labeled "negative self-talk" by Albert Ellis, the founder of rational-emotive therapy, and by Aaron Beck, the developer of cognitive treatment of depression.

The anger-producing negative self-talk usually takes the form of: "That bitch, who the hell does she think she is, telling me what to do?" or: "I can't take it, she has gone too far." Once the client begins to listen to the statements he is making to himself, he can be taught to develop positive statements on 3"x5" cards, to contradict the negative statements. Such positive self-talk statements may include the following: "I can control myself. I'm the only one who can control myself. I don't need to prove anything." The purpose of these statements is to get the client to understand that he has feelings other than anger.

In summary, in the initial phase of treatment, the therapist should have the client tune into his physiological signs of anger, use his time-out signals, perform deep breathing exercises or progressive relaxation techniques and then read silently his positive self-talk statements. The goal of each of these steps is to ultimately pair relaxation with physiological arousal.

**THE MIDDLE PHASE OF TREATMENT**

Because the violence can potentially be stopped within a short period of time, most abusers or batterers attempt to — and
sometimes do — discontinue treatment after one to seven sessions. However, as Ganley et al (1978) point out, the batterer is at risk for the rest of his life and should be encouraged to continue treatment for at least six months to a year. In the model used at the Center for Abusive Behavior, the client is encouraged to become more thoroughly acquainted with his abusive or battering self through a variety of therapeutic teaching techniques such as transactional analysis, projective drawing and the egogram as developed by Dusay (1977). Dusay defines the egogram as a visual symbol that represents the total personality of any human being by separating it into its various aspects and clearly showing which parts are “weak” and which parts are “strong.”

A continuation of the anger diary concept utilized in the first phase of treatment, the egogram helps the batterer discover the parts of his person which cause him difficulty in interacting with others. Similar to the concepts of Parent, Adult and Child in transactional analysis, each self in the egogram has a cognitive, behavioral and affective component. The egogram helps the client see himself and his spouse more clearly.

Projective drawing is used to gain insight into the ways the client sees himself interact with his family. Typically, the client is asked to draw a picture of himself and his family engaged in a group activity.

As further steps in the middle phase of treatment, the client’s “anger” behavior is monitored from week to week. The client’s spouse is spoken with frequently by telephone and is periodically invited to therapy sessions. In addition, the Center offers a “male role group” which focuses on male/female defined roles and the way in which these characteristics apply to or interfere with present or past relationships. Also, there is a continuing attempt to teach assertion training techniques and non-violent conflict resolution.

THE THIRD PHASE OF TREATMENT

Women who have been battered or are being battered also need specialized counseling. They may not psychologically understand battering and its effects, and they may be indecisive about whether to stay with their partner.

First, the therapist needs to create a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere for treating the battered woman, exactly the same as the atmosphere important to treating the batterer. The client usually begins by discussing her “war stories” about the violence in her home. After that catharsis, the client is ready to listen and learn about the battering syndrome. The therapist should inform her about the shelters available and the fact that unless something is done about the problem, the violence will get worse. Above all, she should be made aware that the violence is not a result of what she has done, but that the batterer is responsible for his lack of impulse control and violent actions. She must understand that assault is a crime and is not to be condoned.

The woman client who has been beaten over a long period of time often has a low level of self-esteem about her roles as wife, lover or mother. Often, she believes implicitly what the partner has been telling her. Also, a woman who has been verbally and physically abused begins to fight back. She needs to look at her problems with impulse control and her desire to win an argument or have the last word. The therapist can help her examine the fights and gain perspective and insight into her relationship and the behaviors surrounding it.

As the relationship between the therapist and the battered woman grows, the client may or may not leave the violent situation. Still, she can monitor the fights and become aware of options other than fighting. Some women, even after leaving a battering situation, remain in therapy to insure that they won't repeat the violent pattern again.

The children in the abusive family have been affected by seeing or experiencing the violence and need to be evaluated and treated professionally. They need to understand that the parents are not fighting because of anything they did and that they cannot control the fighting.

By treating the children, a therapist can help prevent violence in the next generation. Children are “copy-cats” and look to their parents as role models. When children live around violence, they often model that behavior, as many research statistics show.

Art therapy and play therapy are effective tools for bringing out the child's feel-
Through treatment the couple learns to monitor their arguments and give signal to each other to avoid a physical confrontation.

ings and thoughts. Through drawings, puppets and dolls, the child can represent his family involved in typical scenes of conflict. Then, the child can be encouraged to consider options other than fighting. By this technique, the child can learn ways to step away from the destructive behavior.

After the individual counseling for the wife and children is terminated and the abusive behavior has stopped, conjoint therapy may be initiated, if desired.

In the initial stage of conjoint therapy, the couple must learn basic communication skills. They need to understand how to be a sender and a receiver of communication from their spouse. They are encouraged not to engage in name-calling or to bring up problems or grievances more than 48 hours old which tend to cloud the main issue.

Through treatment, the couple learns to monitor their arguments and give signal to each other to avoid a physical confrontation. They are encouraged to bring their disagreements into the therapy session rather than to fight them out at home. With treatment, they understand that through negotiation and re-education they can learn to lead a better married life without physical violence.

CONCLUSION

In addition to therapeutic techniques, successful treatment depends to a great extent on the attitude and skills of the therapist. In deciding whether to work with batterers as a treatment population, the therapist must be aware of his or her own skills with anger management and fears about violence.

An ability to maintain a supportive relationship and to work through angry crises is essential. Since the therapist will be teaching the client basic skills in anger management and relaxation, he or she must be able to successfully combine teaching with the therapeutic process. With appropriate skills and attitudes, therapists can effectively help motivated batterers control their anger and impulsive behavior.

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WHERE IS THE CHURCH?

Until recently, the church has been the priest and Levite in passing by victims of family violence who have fallen by the wayside. The secular community, in many instances, has been the Good Samaritan, and since 1970, has helped respond to the crisis of family violence with shelters and telephone "crisis lines." Often, the church's "passing by" has been unintentional, especially on the part of the clergy. They simply do not "see" the victim standing before them. Most commonly, when asked about family violence, they comment, "No one ever comes to see me with this problem..." The seemingly logical conclusion of their limited perception is "...so you see, I don't need information about family violence."

Many victims or abusers hesitate to go to their clergy for fear of the response; they fear talking to yet another person who either does not know how to help or whose help may in fact be detrimental. Often hidden from public view, family violence has nevertheless reached epidemic proportions in the U.S. Even good, church-going Christians are not exempt from the statistics of victims and abusers. The United Methodist Church, surveying a portion of its membership, found that 68 percent of those questioned had personally experienced family violence. 

Ironically, the church has failed to hear the suffering of violent families because, in general, it has failed to speak out. During the final session of a several-week seminar for clergy, one local pastor commented with some distress that in the past few weeks he had encountered two incest cases and a rape in his small congregation. In exploring this further, it was discovered that he had announced from the pulpit that he was taking a seminar on sexual and domestic violence and that he thought it was a valuable course. This brief announcement apparently gave the congregation "permission" to approach him.
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with these problems and the confidence that he would be able to help them. As a result, people in the church who had been struggling for some time with incestuous abuse and the rape experience came to him for help.

The stigma surrounding family violence remains great, especially in the church. Victims and abusers are the "new lepers" among us. In our silence, we pretend not to see the suffering. We are disbelieving when a friend or parishioner pours forth a story of abuse, especially if the abuser is a respected and well known member of the congregation. We make clear that we do not want to know about the pain and its source. Or if we do recognize the violence, we recommend more prayers and Bible study and send the person back into a frightening and confusing situation. It is no wonder that people hesitate to come to the church for help. Yet, at all times the church can and must represent the Good Samaritan for people who are afraid, confused and in pain.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Two gospel stories can help us shape the church's response to family violence. The Good Samaritan story in Luke 10: 29-37 provides a model of compassionate response to a bruised and battered victim of violence. In it, we are called to see the victim before us and respond with our material resources to provide immediate protection and support. Pressing us to another dimension of response, the story in Luke 18:1-8 describes a widow who persists in seeking vindication from the judge who did not fear God nor care about the people. Finally the judge tires of her persistence and grants her request for vindication against her adversary. Then, Jesus says, even so God hears and will vindicate those who cry out. In many cases the church, as the widow, is called to persist in advocating for the powerless and vulnerable — the victims of family violence.

This persistence may involve advocating for individuals who need legal, medical or social aid, or it may involve advocating on a larger scale to change unjust laws and practices which exacerbate the suffering of victims of family violence and deny help for the abusers, leaving them to repeat their past sins.

The gospel mandate is clear: We as the church are called to bind up the wounds of the victims and to confront the destructive actions of the abusers. In short, we are called to seek justice.

SHAPING A RESPONSE

Social ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison says that the role of ministry is to make public issues out of private pains, i.e., to take the individual suffering of people, attend to it, and then address it in a larger social context. This is certainly an appropriate way of viewing family violence. Violence is a personal tragedy for the individuals in a violent family, but it is not an isolated personal event. Family violence is largely a social problem created and sustained by social forces which underlie the individual battering incidents. It must be addressed as a crisis for the individual family and as an ongoing social problem of disturbing magnitude. Our response as the church must be to address family violence on both personal and public levels. Whether our role is parish pastor, pastoral counselor, Sunday School teacher or friend, we are part of the church's response to family violence and we each can be a significant part of the pastoral, prophetic and preventive response.

A PASTORAL RESPONSE

Family violence raises particular religious issues which need attention; it may even precipitate a crisis of faith. Questions about separation and divorce, family authority and responsibility, the meaning of suffering, and the possibility of forgiveness are all critical concerns to those touched by family violence. Too often secular resources fail to address religious questions, and pastors — out of ignorance and discomfort — tend to respond with platitudes and empty prayers. Religious questions need an informed and appropriate pastoral response.

To respond with sensitivity, clergy and lay persons need special education and training to understand what family violence is all about. Often general counseling techniques which many clergy learned in seminary — especially marriage counseling — are inadequate and inappropriate to deal with family violence. Clergy and lay persons need to know more about the dynamics of family violence and the kinds of help which are effective when responding to a parishioner or friend.

The first goal in counseling is to stop the violent act, which, potentially, can be terribly destructive or even lethal. The objective of an initial intervention, therefore, cannot be simply to preserve the family
unit at all costs. To attempt to avoid separation or divorce — when there is violence — forces people to remain in a life-threatening situation. The once-viable marriage covenant has become empty and meaningless, and to remain physically together while the violence continues is a charade which is more damaging than a temporary separation or the consideration of divorce. If the abuser is willing to seek treatment to stop the violence, however, rebuilding the relationship may be possible in the future.

To stop the violence, pastors or lay counselors may need to be confrontative. Although the church tends to shy away from confrontation, in this case it may be the most loving and helpful thing to do. Sometimes the victims of family violence need to be confronted with the reality of the danger they and their children face in order to motivate them to seek protection. Likewise, abusers need to be confronted with the reality of what they are doing to themselves and their families. Too often no one cares enough to say: “This has got to stop.” Confrontation is not the same as harsh and punitive judgment which drives abusers further into isolation. Confrontation can and should be supportive and encourage abusers to seek treatment.

To fully provide for the needs of victims and abusers, pastors and lay counselors need to be aware and make use of secular resources for shelter, legal advocacy and treatment. Most large communities and many smaller ones now have some type of crisis services for abused women. In smaller communities, these services have often been established by church people working with others in the community. These services are a valuable resource and can provide assistance which individual ministers cannot, especially in the area of shelter for victims and long-term treatment for abusers. Pastors need to work cooperatively with community services in order to increase their effectiveness and be able to share their particular expertise as a pastoral resource.

The church as a community of faith also has a pastoral role to play. The congregation which responds with genuine concern and compassion when a family loses a loved one often has difficulty when that same family faces family violence. Yet, friends in the congregation can provide the ongoing community support which each of the family members needs to stop the violence and be healed from its pain. In one study, over half of the abused women who had left abusive relationships did so with the aid of family and friends rather than traditional counseling resources. Many women who are unwilling to talk with a pastor or therapist about their abusive treatment may seek help from lay people whom they know through their church.

T HE PROPHETIC RESPONSE

One of the reasons that family violence has reached epidemic proportions is that there has been no public institution which has forthrightly said that family violence is unacceptable and must be stopped. We have the resurgence of the women’s movement to thank for bringing the issue to public attention in the past ten years. But even so, the legal, religious, social service, mental health and medical institutions have moved slowly to take a strong public position opposing violence in the family.

The church is called to be prophetic and with a strong voice challenge the notion that family violence is a private matter — an area into which no one outside the family should venture. Further, the church must challenge the widely-accepted idea that the husband/father in a family has the absolute right to do whatever violence he wishes with other family members. The absence of the church’s outspoken concern on this issue perpetuates the silence for both victims and abusers and minimizes the potential impact that the church should have in shaping public opinion and moral standards about domestic violence.

A prophetic response must be based on solid theological and ethical consideration and study. Unfortunately some of the history of the Christian tradition has reinforced the notion that family violence is acceptable. An example of this is apparent in a quotation from the 15th century publication called Rules of Marriage:

“Scold your wife sharply, bully and terrify her. If this does not work, take up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body... Then readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul so that the beating will redound to your merit and her good.”

An embarrassment to Christians in the twentieth century, this passage nevertheless makes apparent the need for theological and scriptural homework in order to ground
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the prophetic voice in the liberating truth of the Gospels. Then, we can speak with the power and authority of the Word not only to the church but also to the wider community. It is vital that the Christian community conveys the clear message that "people are not for hitting and abuse," a conviction based on the belief in the sacredness of human persons.

A PREVENTIVE RESPONSE

The church's preventive role is, in the long run, the most important one. The church remains a significant locus of education, new awareness and moral standards for many in the community. The church has the opportunity to shape people's understanding of themselves, their relationship with God, and their relationships with other persons, particularly in the family. Family life education in the church presents an ideal context for helping families learn how to shape their relationships in non-violent, respectful and creative ways. In this respect, prevention moves to a broader category of justice-making, and the work of the church is to enable families to address such issues as sex role stereotyping, multicultural experience and appreciation, stewardship of the family's material resources, conflict and problem solving, shared decision making, use of television, etc. Such family modeling can also take place in the context of the Gospel's values (see Resources). Providing the awareness and skills to families to maintain caring, nurturing, challenging, just relationships is a primary prevention strategy which can help break the cycle of violence.

Also, in the context of examining methods to prevent family violence, pre-marriage counseling must approach the topics of anger, conflict and violence, as well as the more common subjects of money, sexuality, in-laws, occupations, etc. For those couples who are still in the first blush of romance, this topic is often jarring and sobering. It pushes couples to consider what they will do if violence occurs, and it helps them clarify basic ground rules with each other in advance of marriage. The counseling session helps them realize that while anger and conflict are inevitable in their relationship, violence is not. They can make a covenant together based on a just and non-violent relationship. They can consider their potential for violence based on their personal and family histories and their expectation for the marriage relationship. This can help prevent them from being caught up in the cycle of family violence in the future.

Similarly, working with teenagers is an excellent educational opportunity to help prevent family violence. Adolescence is a formative period in the areas of self-image, sexuality and expectations of relationships, and abusive patterns formed in teenage relationships are hard to break in later marriages. Teenagers need a strong and consistent message which runs counter to the often abusive and exploitative media message which bombards their consciousness. Young people need information about their own sexuality, and about sexual abuse as well, so if someone in their family attempts to take advantage of them, they will know where and whom to ask for help.

The problem of abuse of the elderly by their adult children is becoming increasingly apparent. The church can help prevent this form of family violence by trying to minimize the stress created in families which have the responsibility of caring for an elderly person. In addition, regular visits by clergy and lay persons to shut-ins provides older persons with a dependable contact outside the family. A trained and sensitive person can detect difficulty and then assist the older person in dealing with an abusive situation before it becomes chronic.

THE CHURCH: ROADBLOCK OR RESOURCE?

Violent families who are in any way affiliated with the church encounter it as either a roadblock or a resource. The church's silence and inability and, in some cases, unwillingness to realize the suffering caused by family violence create enormous roadblocks which prevent victims and abusers from seeking help. When the church does acknowledge the problem, its theological and pastoral approach can often be damaging, thereby creating still more confusion and guilt which immobolizes victims or abusers in their efforts to stop the violence. Sometimes the church even takes a defensive role and tries to isolate its members from assistance provided by state law. Thus it creates a roadblock for the family which might otherwise receive assistance from secular as well as religious resources. Sometimes these roadblocks force church members into a difficult choice
between the church with its counterproductive advice, and the person's own survival. The corporate church and personal faith can and should be invaluable resources for individuals facing family violence. Through prayer and personal support victims can gain the strength and courage to leave the abuse behind, and abusers can make the changes necessary in order to stop the violence. The church — the community of faith — working with and through other resources in our communities, can assure that there is adequate shelter, support and advocacy for those who need it. The church must speak out to remind people that there is nothing in the Christian message which justifies the abuse of another person. As the Body of Christ, both the church and individual members of the congregation are called to remove the roadblocks to loving and effective care. Then our pastoral, prophetic, and preventive response can more adequately become the resources which make justice a possibility for both victims and abusers who suffer from family violence.

FOOTNOTES

1. In a recent survey conducted by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, however, we found that parish clergy surveyed nationally averaged 13.7 persons per year coming to them with situations which constituted family violence.

2. In one survey sample of 81 abused women, only 18 percent indicated that they had called upon clergy for help; of those, half were satisfied with the clergy response and half were unsatisfied. This information comes from Ellsworth and Wagner, "Formerly Battered Women: A Follow-up Study," an unpublished manuscript, University of Washington School of Social Work, 1980.

3. It is estimated that 50 to 60 percent of couples will experience physical violence at some point in their relationship. One out of five female children and one out of 11 male children will experience sexual abuse before reaching the age of 18. At least half of this sexual abuse occurs in the family as incest. See Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Service Providers, Fortune and Hormann, 1980.

4. This survey was conducted by Peggy Halsey and results were published in the Texas Methodist, Oct. 9, 1981, Sharon Mielke, editor. The categories included in this total figure include physical and verbal abuse of a spouse, abuse of a child by the respondent, and physical and sexual abuse experienced by the respondent as a child.

5. Ibid., Ellsworth and Wagner.


RESOURCES

The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence is an interreligious, educational ministry. As a resource primarily to the religious community, it provides workshops for clergy and lay counselors as well as secular professionals on the problem of family violence. It also makes available workshop and curriculum materials for working with adults and teenagers. To receive the Center's bi-monthly newsletter, "Working Together," write to CPSDV, 4250 S. Mead St., Seattle, WA 98118 or call (206) 725-1903.

"Parenting for Peace and Justice," by Kathleen and James McGinnis with tapes, program guide and filmstrip is available from Discipleship Resources, 1908 Grand Ave., P.O. Box 189, Nashville, TN 37202. This is a fine resource for families in churches exploring positive models of parenting and family life.

Love and Negotiate: Creative Conflict In Marriage, by John Scanzoni. Using a strong biblical base, Scanzoni presents a sound alternative to the hierarchial view of marriage: an excellent resource.

TWELVE OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP

1. Volunteer to serve on the board of your local shelter for abused women and gain the experience and knowledge that will enable you to make a significant contribution to the healing of violent families.

2. Volunteer to train as an advocate/counselor for the shelter or crisis line in your community.

3. Sign up for a training seminar to learn ways to effectively counsel victims and abusers.

4. Contribute to the local shelter money or material goods (clothing, furniture, supplies, etc.) through the women's fellowship in your church.

5. Speak up when someone tells a wifebeating joke. Wifebeating is not funny and you need to stand up and be counted.

6. Arrange an adult education series in your church on family violence.

7. Provide brochures in the church's narthex about community services dealing with family violence.

8. Speak up in the community in support of local services for victims and abusers.

9. Keep informed about all legislative issues at the state and national levels. Let your repre-
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sentatives know of your concerns about family violence issues. Be especially aware of how budget cuts are affecting services in your area.

And for clergy...

1. Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to family violence.
2. Preach a sermon about family violence.
3. After you have taken a training seminar, volunteer to be on call at your local shelter when it needs a clergyperson.

Editorial

Dr. Sharon Sweeney and John Key then discuss some counseling techniques which they have found to be helpful in working with violent families. Dr. Sweeney, a clinical psychologist, has counseled battered women and children for many years at Haven House in Pasadena, the nation's oldest shelter. Her collaborator in this article, John Key, is a licensed marriage, family and child counselor who has specialized in the management of aggressive and assaultive behavior. Co-founders of the Center for Abusive Behavior in Pasadena, they are nationally recognized leaders in the area of psychotherapy with violent families.

Finally, the Reverend Marie Fortune addresses some of the concrete steps which all of us, as members of the Christian community, can take to alleviate this major social problem. Ms. Fortune is perhaps the nation's best known educator of clergy and laity in domestic violence issues. She is the director of a family violence education center in Seattle and co-author, with Denise Hormann, of an important monograph called Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Service Providers.

In total, I believe these articles do more than merely inform us about a social epidemic. They also challenge us to action. Community awareness will never solve the problem, but community action can. This recognition brings to mind an old and familiar saying which seems particularly apropos to the crisis which appears to engulf us: All that it takes for the triumph of evil is for good men (and women) to do nothing.

Psychological Issues

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Novaco, R. Anger and coping with provocation. Unpublished manuscript, Univ. of California, Irvine, 92717 (Program in Social Ecology).

Novaco, R. "Therapist manual for stress inoculation training." Unpublished manuscript, Univ. of California, Irvine.


From My Perspective

Teamwork is a key component in the successful completion of projects both great and small. It takes teamwork to win a baseball game, run an office, organize community programs and perform a limitless number of other group activities.

As all of us at Fuller are well aware, it also takes teamwork to carry out the ministry of the Seminary, including, of course, the Office of Alumni and Church Relations. Teamwork has already enabled the Alumni Cabinet to increase its effectiveness in coordinating the activities of the Alumni Association.

Teamwork has also helped area leaders of various Alumni Chapters design significant educational and inspirational programs for their chapter events. This spirit of teamwork has even extended into the area of gifts to the Seminary, as a growing number of alumni participate financially in Fuller’s on-going and out-reaching ministry.

While we rejoice in the faithful commitment of so many of our alumni, we also realize that so much more needs to be accomplished.

Among our alumni, we have an unbounded potential. God has blessed the Seminary with many uniquely dedicated men and women, and they — approximately 4,200 have graduated to date — who are seeking to obey God’s call.

If we join together as participants and not simply as spectators, we can reach new dimensions in our witness. Together — as a team — we alumni can fulfill our call and our purpose: to be of service to one another, to the current students at Fuller, and especially, to God. What a demanding challenge and an exciting opportunity!

MARLON J. SANDLIN
Director of Alumni and Church Relations

Deaths

Charles J. Mellis (MAMiss'75) died in December 1981 in Fullerton, CA.

Ray J. Kusumoto (BD'54) died in February 1982 in Honolulu, HI.

Publications

Robert A. Guelich (STB'84) is author of The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding, published by Word Books. He is serving as professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago, IL.

Doman Lum (BD'63) edited Social Work and Health Care Policy by Allanheld, Osmon Publishers. He is serving as professor of social work at California State University, Sacramento, CA.

The 50s

Everett V. Black (MDiv'52) is serving as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Clearwater, KS.

David L. Larsen (MDiv'56) is serving as associate pastor of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, teaching Homiletics and Practical Theology.

Harold F. Legant (MDiv'52) is serving as pastor of the Linden Community Baptist Church, Fenton, MI.

The 60s

Ronn Garton (BD'64) is serving as pastor of Mendocino Presbyterian Church, Mendocino, CA.

L. Barry Phelps (MDiv'66) is serving as associate for Congregational Development and Support in the Presbyterian Church of Southern Kansas, in Wichita, KS.

The 70s

John C. Bennett (MACCS'77) is serving as executive director of the Association of Church Relations.

The 80s

Susan E. Brooks (MDiv'80) is serving as assistant pastor at First United Presbyterian Church, Sterling, CO. Susan recently received an award from the Sterling Jaycees for Outstanding Young Religious Leader.

David P. McBeth (DMIn'81) is serving as director of the Samaritan Counseling Center in Nacogdoches, TX.

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