

WHAT IF JESUS HAD BEEN A WOMAN

The Myth of Redemptive Suffering

Elizabeth Bettenhausen—“Christian theology has long imposed upon women a norm of imitative self-sacrifice based on the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Powerlessness is equated with faithfulness. When the cross is also interpreted as the salvific work of an all-powerful paternal deity, women’s well being is as secure as that of a child cowering before an abusive father.” (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse, p. xii; edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Audre Lorde—“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

Brown and Parker, For God So Loved the World?—“The believer whose thoughts and feelings have been shaped by a tradition that teaches or ritualizes in liturgy the Christus Victor view may interpret her or his suffering in this light. In response to suffering it will be said, Be patient, something good will come of this.” (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse, edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Brown and Parker, For God So Loved the World?—“Women are acculturated to accept abuse. We come to believe that it is our place to suffer . . . Christianity has been a primary—in many women’s lives the primary—force in shaping our acceptance of abuse. The central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive.” (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse, p. 1-2)

Mary Daly—“The qualities that Christianity idealizes, especially for women, are also those of a victim: sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc. Since these are the qualities idealized in Jesus ‘who died for our sins,’ his functioning as a model reinforces the scapegoat syndrome for women.” (Beyond God the Father, p. 77)

Brown and Parker, For God So Loved the World?—“The problem with this theology is that it asks people to suffer for the sake of helping evildoers see their evil ways. It puts concern for the evildoers ahead of concern for the victim of evil. It makes victims the servants of the evildoers’ salvation.” (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse, p. 20.)

Delores S. Williams—“African-American Christian women can, through their religion and its leaders, be led passively to accept their own oppression and suffering— if the women are taught that suffering is redemptive.” (Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk, p. 161)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—“We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force . . . But be assured that we’ll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.” (A Christmas Sermon on Peace, 1967)

Brown and Parker, For God So Loved the World?—Martin Luther King, Jr. saw suffering as “a most creative and powerful social force . . . The non-violent say that suffering becomes a powerful social force when you willingly accept that violence on yourself, so that self-suffering stands at the center of the non-violent movement and the individuals involved are able to suffer in a creative manner, feeling that unearned suffering is redemptive, and that suffering may serve to transform the social situation.” (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse; edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

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Joan Carlson Brown & Rebecca Parker—"It is not the acceptance of suffering that gives life; it is commitment to life that gives life. The question, moreover, is not Am I willing to suffer? but Do I desire fully to live? This distinction is subtle and, to some, specious, but in the end it makes a great difference in how people interpret and respond to suffering." (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse, p. 18, edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Brown and Parker, For God So Loved the World?—Jesus did not choose the cross. He "chose to live a life in opposition to unjust, oppressive cultures.... Jesus chose integrity and faithfulness, refusing to change course because of threat." (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse; edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Brown and Parker, For God So Loved the World?—"Such a theology has devastating effects on human life. The reality is that victimization never leads to triumph. It can lead to extended pain if it is not refused or fought. It can lead to destruction of the human spirit through the death of a person's sense of power, worth, dignity. or creativity. It can lead to actual death. By denying the reality of suffering and death, the **Christus Victor** theory of the atonement defames all those who suffer and trivializes tragedy. (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse; edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

Brown and Parker—"Suffering is never redemptive, and suffering cannot be redeemed. The cross is a sign of tragedy. God's grief is revealed there and everywhere and every time life is thwarted by violence. God's grief is as ultimate as God's love. Every tragedy eternally remains and is eternally mourned. Eternally the murdered scream, Betrayal. Eternally God sings kaddish for the world. To be a Christian means keeping: faith with those who have heard and lived God's call for justice, radical love, and liberation; who have challenged unjust systems both political and ecclesiastical; and who in that struggle have refused to be victims and have refused to cower under the threat of violence, suffering, and death. Fullness of life is attained in moments of decision for such faithfulness and integrity. When the threat of death is refused and the choice is made for justice, radical love, and liberation, the power of death is overthrown. Resurrection is radical courage. Resurrection means that death is overcome in those precise instances when human beings choose life, refusing the threat of death. Jesus climbed out of the grave in the Garden of Gethsemane when he refused to abandon his commitment to the truth even though his enemies threatened him with death. On Good Friday, the Resurrected One was Crucified." (For God So Loved the World?)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—"And if a man happens to be 36 years old, as I happen to be, some great truth stands before the door of his life — some great opportunity to stand up for that which is right. A man might be afraid his home will get bombed, or he's afraid that he will lose his job, or he's afraid that he will get shot, or beat down by state troopers, and he may go on and live until he's 80. He's just as dead at 36 as he would be at 80. The cessation of breathing in his life is merely the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. He died...A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true."(Selma, Alabama, March 8 1965, the day after "Bloody Sunday")

Mark 8.35-36—"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

Mark 8.34—Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Elizabeth Bettenhausen—"Several years ago I asked a group of seminarians to choose New Testament stories about Jesus and rewrite them imagining that Jesus had been female. The following recreation of the passion story of Luke 22.54-65 was one woman's knowing by heart.

"They arrested the Christ woman and led her away to the Council for questioning. Some of her followers straggled along to find out what was to become of her. There were seven women and two men followers. (The men followers were there mainly to keep watch over their sisters.) Someone from among the crowd asked a question of a man follower, 'Haven't I seen you with this woman? Who is she, and what is your relationship with her?' He replied defensively, 'She is a prostitute, she has had many men. I have seen her with many!' The men who were guarding the Christ [woman] slapped her around and made fun of her. They told her to use magic powers to stop them. They blindfolded her and each them in turn raped her and afterward jeered, 'Now, prophetess, who was in you? Which one of us? Tell us that!' Thy continued to insult her. (Kandice Joyce)

After this story was read aloud, a silence surrounded the class and made us shiver. Ever since, I have wondered would women ever imagine forming a religion around the rape of a woman? Would we ever conjure gang-rape as a salvific event for other women? What sort of god would such an event reveal?" (Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse, p. xi-xii, edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

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