

#3C

CHAPTER 11

Evil, Sin, and Violation of the Vulnerable

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CONTEXT AND COMMITMENT

I have been raped
be-
cause I have been wrong the wrong sex the wrong age
the wrong skin the wrong nose the wrong hair the
wrong need the wrong dream the wrong geographic
the wrong sartorial I

.....
I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name
My name is my own my own my own
and I can't tell you who the hell set things up like this
but I can tell you that from now on my resistance
my simple and daily and nightly self-determination
may very well cost you your life¹

The context for my discussion of evil and sin in light of liberation from sexual and domestic abuse is war: war of the strong against the vulnerable, all those judged by our society to be "wrong" or the "appropriate victims." Though present statistics are imprecise and are likely to remain so because of varying definitions of abuse and chronic underreporting by victims and social agencies, they are essential to describe this context. One out of every five married women is battered. Domestic violence is the major cause of injury to women, exceeding rapes, muggings, and auto accidents. One in seven married women is sexually abused by her husband. Almost one out of every two women will become a victim of completed or attempted rape in her lifetime. One out of every nine children under eighteen is abused or neglected by parent or guardian. Three out of every hundred children are threatened by their parents with a gun or a knife. About 2,000 abused children die each year. One out of

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every three to five female and every eleven male children will be sexually assaulted by the age of 19. Two and a half million elders (mostly women) are abused by caretakers every year.²

Given this concrete situation, we do not have the luxury of standing neutrally on the sidelines. We must choose either to be resistance fighters working to end these "corrosions of sacred possibilities" or collaborators contributing to the desecration of the lives of the vulnerable. Christianity and North American culture have both chosen, through their indifference and participation in the "conspiracy of silence," to be passive and active accomplices in these crimes against the vulnerable.

The North American movement to liberate the vulnerable from sexual and domestic abuse has been the major factor shaping my theological reflection in recent years. As a teacher in a liberal Protestant seminary, leader of clergy and professional workshops, community member, family member, and friend, I have heard and read countless stories of violation of and violence against those most vulnerable. As a woman, I have not escaped the daily debilitating effects of sexual terrorism in our society and violation and violence in my personal life. As a white middle class woman who lived for a month in an urban shelter for women and children, I have begun to learn how important it is to take seriously women's economic dependence and to pay attention to the specific racial and cultural contexts of victim-survivors. Answering the prophetic call to advocate with and for those among us who are "the distressed" (in Hebrew, the *anawim*), I am committed to: working with others to dismantle the systems, behaviors, and attitudes that perpetuate and extend these kinds of oppression; to building a more just and full life for all; and to developing a theology of liberation from sexual and domestic abuse.

Listening to victim-survivors has persuaded me that an appropriate and adequate method for this theology of liberation will include the following seven components: First, it must be grounded in and responsive to the practical experiences of oppression and liberation of particular victims. Much of what I have to say is sparked by the reflections of those struggling to overcome this oppression in their lives. Second, it must draw on alternate texts for its sources. Autobiographies, journal entries, first-hand oral accounts, and various forms of artistic expression are essential to the communication of these intense experiences, for these more direct ways of witnessing break through our denial more quickly. Third, it must be self-consciously interdisciplinary, using psychological and sociological analyses to understand the dynamics of these intimate forms of oppression and ideology critique to show how society reinforces such behaviors and relational patterns. Fourth, it must pay attention to the interlocking sets of oppression that compound the horror of sexual and domestic abuse. Classism, racism, and ageism as well as sexism function together (more like strands in a cable than links in a chain) in

this oppression, and we must investigate how they reinforce one another without singling out any one as the root cause. Fifth, it must contribute to the empowerment of women as agents and persons. Sixth, it must be oriented toward practical, concrete change that includes the resistance of individuals and social groups, for these are issues of social justice, not personal morality. Finally, it must take care that its theoretical and practical recommendations remain provisional. If a new absolute definition of sin is substituted for the old one, we shall not have served these victims well. As I will argue, specific behaviors that are labelled "sin" by theologians are often *at the time of abuse* positive survival tactics for which the victims should be praised rather than faulted. For example, if we define sin only as "diffusion of the self," a generally helpful definition for women, victims may hear this as a judgment upon themselves for "losing themselves" to protect themselves during the abuse. We must be clear therefore that *any* definitions of sin offered must be applied, understood, and evaluated only within precisely described determinate contexts and that the victims themselves have the stronger claim to making final judgments about whether particular actions at particular times are sinful.

CONSTRUCTION

We know a gigantic tree in the depths of a vast forest
A great snake hanging down, reaching and reaching
Down to the center of the earth, always downward
When it touches the earth it is long enough and strong
 enough to reach the sky
—Protect us as you protected the first woman and man
Against ourselves, against each other
 against human sacrifice
Against what will not let a thing be born
Against “we do not know what we do not wish to know”³

In feminist liberation theologies dealing with sexual and domestic abuse, most attention has been paid to the reconstruction of the creation doctrines of male-female relations, marriage and family, and the mind-body relationship;⁴ to the reconciliation doctrines of grace, forgiveness and healing;⁵ and to the ministry doctrine of clergy-lay relationships; with some attention also to images of God and theodicy.⁶ Recognizing that all doctrines need to be reworked from the perspective of the liberation of the vulnerable from sexual and domestic abuse, I have chosen to focus on evil and sin; for it is this doctrine that continues to be one of the most powerful tools in the church's collusion with society in the victimization of women, children, and elders.

Evil and sin together may be called "wickedness,"⁷ the complex condition of the lack of right relations in the world in which we live naturally, socially and individually. Though they are inseparable, it is

important to distinguish the two. Evil, as Latin American liberation theology has taught us, is systemic. It is not superpersonal forces but structures of oppression; patterns larger than individuals and groups with a life of their own that tempt us toward injustice and impiety—social, political, economic arrangements that distort our perceptions or restrain our abilities to such an extent that we find it difficult to choose or do good. By contrast, sin refers to those free, discrete acts of responsible individuals that create or reinforce these structures of oppression. Neither causes the other; evil and sin are mutually reinforcing.

Both evil and sin are essential concepts for a theology of liberation of the vulnerable from sexual and domestic abuse. Further, it is crucial to emphasize both sides of evil as systemic: lament and blame.⁸ Evil as lament is important in calling our attention to the need for solidarity with victims as innocent sufferers. Evil as blame is equally important. To a woman taught to blame herself for being abused, this notion, associated with the perpetrator's participation in an evil structure, can be freeing. As victim after victim recounts, "It was my fault. And I take responsibility for it." Evil as blame redirects attention to the structures that have power over her and for which she is not solely, ultimately, or directly responsible, thereby helping victims to ask the liberating question, "Who the hell set things up like this?" In so doing it challenges the use of the doctrine of original sin, understood as inherent guilt or ineradicable shame, to blame the victim.

Because the concept of original sin has been used against women and other socially designated sacrificial victims we should be suspicious of it. This is also true of the concept of actual sin. While it is important to retain both concepts, not only for perpetrators but for victims as well, we must be careful in identifying and interpreting them. For example, if sin, as the choice or decision to contribute to evil structures, assumes some freedom of will, then it is difficult to say that children or women dehumanized by years of terror in domestic or "foreign" situations have enough freedom or range of options within a situation to be able to commit sin. Yet, in spite of the thorniness of the issue, I am not prepared to relinquish the notion of sin for anyone who has ever been a victim. Why? The concept of sin, in contrast to evil, highlights the personal side of wickedness and in so doing fights against the common tendency to externalize evil to such an extent that each individual is exempt from all responsibility and accountability for it. Far from contributing to a recognition of evil as systemic, this romanticist projection of evil furthers evil structures by exonerating individuals.

The concept of actual, universal sin also checks the tendency to reduce the moral universe to a dualism of heroes and villains. Not interested in a simplistic assessment of blame, which contributes to immobilizing guilt and resentment rather than heartfelt repentance and concrete change, I do not want to suggest that the perpetrators (largely men) are wholly evil

and the victims (largely women) are wholly good. Women and other victims are no more or less pure than men. Therefore, it is important to look at the ways in which victims as well as perpetrators have been tempted by evil structures, lured into complying with their victimization. I have tried to reconceptualize sin in relation to abuse by attending to differences between men's and women's responses to these structures of oppression.

In my reconstruction of sin I have acknowledged adult victims' complicity in their victimization without focusing the blame for victimization on them. I have also tried to shift the burden away from victims to perpetrators. For as I develop the notion of sin, I want to avoid blaming the victim and giving the impression that perpetrators (largely men) and victims (largely women) are coresponsible or equally sinful. This view, suggested by some family systems approaches and neo-orthodox views of sin, is not helpful to victims. For this reason, I find it important to point out that evil and sin, though inseparable, are to be stressed differently in varying contexts. When one is speaking of perpetrators, sin, individual responsibility, and accountability should be stressed. If, on the contrary, one stresses evil or the coresponsibility of the perpetrator, he is allowed to escape his responsibility. When one is speaking of and to victims, evil should be stressed. If one stresses sinfulness to them, they are encouraged to continue in their feelings of self-blame and over-responsibility. In neither case should the companion concept be forgotten (for it is as freeing to men to learn that they are tempted by evil structures as it is for women to learn that they are responsible in part for the direction of their lives), but it should not be primary.

SIN AS DISTORTION OF FEELING

Anger and vocal, vehement resistance have traditionally been identified as sinful or anti-Christian. It is particularly women, children, and other powerless individuals who are expected to imitate the meek and mild Jesus in this regard. They are told to deny what is happening to them and to dissolve their anger. Instead of dissolving anger, which results in great harm, they should be encouraged to redirect "this natural and healthy psycho-physical response to situations in which these capacities are being frustrated."⁹ Anger is the opposite not of love but of self-blame.¹⁰ If we encourage victims to channel their anger toward individual and social change instead of dissipating it by not expressing it directly or actively toward its correct object, we will contribute to their recovery and social transformation. If all of us were to speak and act out against sexual and domestic abuse with the righteous indignation of the prophets, we would no longer be colluding in an oppressive system of violence.

What happens when we shift our view of sin as anger and resistance to that of moral callousness, as Mary Pellauer has suggested? By "moral callousness" she means good, moral persons' participation in and per-

petuation of violence against women "simply by going about our business in an ordinary way. We do so primarily by our quotidian participation in social patterns and institutions which make up the bulk of everyday life."¹¹ This ignorance and acceptance, taking violence against the vulnerable for granted, giving in to numbness, is what the scriptures call "hardening of the heart," one of the surest signs of having wandered off away from God.

As many have noted, in our culture the great taboo is not against incest and other forms of abuse but against talking about these abuses. More than a silence born of ignorance, this is a failure to acknowledge a reality of horror that surrounds us. The title of Alice Miller's book on child sexual abuse, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, makes this point clearly. Miller suggests that we are prone to this denial because we "prefer to take upon ourselves the hell of blindness, alienation, abuse, deception, subordination, and loss of self rather than lose that place called Paradise, which offers us security."¹² Toni Morrison's conclusion to her wrenching novel about the rape and impregnation of a young girl by her father, *The Bluest Eye*, suggests another reason. "We tried to see her without looking at her, and never, never went near. Not because she was absurd, or repulsive, or because we were frightened, but because we had failed her."¹³ Whatever the motivations for our denial, the fact remains that the silence itself renders us guilty, corporately and individually, of complicity.

This notion of sin as hardening of heart or moral callousness, as useful as it may be for the perpetrators and colluders, is problematic from the perspective of the victim's survival and recovery. It is not to be confused with the numbing of the self, the striving to feel nothing physically or emotionally, the oblivion, the dissociation, that victims often recount. In situations of abuse this numbing is used as a necessary survival technique in order to distance themselves sufficiently from the abuse in order to bear it until such time as they are able to escape or alter the situation.

SIN AS BETRAYAL OF TRUST

Another popular traditional concept of sin that is harmful to victims of sexual and domestic abuse is that of disobedience. Many battered women are trapped in abusive relationships because they have been raised to believe that disobedience to their husbands is unbiblical and sinful. As one said, "He told me he would beat me every day, if that's what it took to make me obey." Our children also suffer when we define sin as disobedience. One of the most indelible lessons children learn at home, school, and church is "Honor thy father and thy mother." Because this is often the only notion of sin drilled into them, they find it hard to understand, let alone resist, the violent and violating actions of their parents or other elders toward them. As Martha Janssen expresses it in her poem, "The Fourth Commandment":

They taught me
not to hate my parent.
Families must love each other
no matter what. . . .¹⁴

Or as Lark d'Helen remembers: "I'd been taught in the good Baptist tradition that a person (and especially a girl) should always respect her elders, particularly men. What was I supposed to do? I trusted you; you were the adult, I was the kid."¹⁵

How do we move from the harmful view of sin as disobedience to the realization that some uses of parental authority are abusive? One way would be to follow Alice Miller's suggestion that we supplement the Fourth Commandment with the following one: "Honor your children so that they will be able to honor others as well as themselves."¹⁶ Another would be to replace the notion of sin as disobedience with the notion of sin as betrayal or lack of trust. This shift focuses attention on a different kind of relationship between persons, for it acknowledges that we exist together primarily not in an external system of rules but in dynamic relationships of trust, fidelity, and mutual obligation that are better described as covenants.¹⁷ This is true in all relationships whether between spouses, lovers, friends, parent and child, professional and client, or teacher and student. In each case both persons, because of the promise involved, rightly *expect* to be treated with care, respect, and honor. In such relationships we entrust our *selves*—bodies, hearts, minds and spirits—to the other; we deliberately and unavoidably make ourselves vulnerable to the other. When the other violates us within that relationship this sacred bond of trust is broken. *This* is the sin, the breaking of the bond by the perpetrator through betrayal of trust, not the brokenness itself, in which victims cannot help participating.

It is the active betrayal of trust that should be the focus in cases of sexual and domestic violence. Instead of deflecting attention to the woman's disobedience (thereby justifying the male's violence against her), we should concentrate on the physical and emotional ways in which perpetrators have broken covenants of partnership. Likewise, when adult or child victims of sexual or other forms of abuse report the crimes to clergy or other professionals, the focus should not be on how they are breaking the bond of the family by going against the conspiracy of silence, but on the way in which the abuse itself has already broken the covenant of parenthood.

This shift away from sin as disobedience to sin as betrayal of trust is not without its difficulties for victims of abuse and must be understood with care. I want to be clear that I am equating sin not with lack of trust in God, another popular traditional definition for sin (particularly for Protestants), but with one person's betrayal of the trust of another. Salvation, the cure for sin, has been described as a process of conversion

from distrust to trust. The reason this classic definition of sin is problematic for victims of sexual and domestic abuse is that victims are trained by the abuse not to trust anyone—loved ones, authority figures, the universe, or God. The natural result of years of living in constant terror and under the threat of severe harm is not trust but fear. "He threatened to kill me if I left. I had no money and nowhere to go. I'd never lived alone and didn't think I could make it by myself." Many incest perpetrators threaten the child with total physical or psychological destruction of the family, death of the child, or death of a pet or other loved one. In situations such as this, in which persons have never had an opportunity to learn to develop basic trust in others or have lost it through torture, can we meaningfully speak of sin as the lack of trust? Perhaps instead we should turn our attention to sin as the destruction of this necessary life-affirming trust in others. For the Sherpas of the Himalayas, for instance, there are two fundamental sins: threatening children and picking wildflowers. And, instead of speaking easily of healing as the turning from lack of trust to trust, we should acknowledge the victim's damaged capacity to trust and difficulty in learning to trust and respect her need to develop her own process of discerning when and whom to trust.

SIN AS LACK OF CARE

A third popular traditional definition of sin harmful to victims recovering from sexual and domestic abuse is that of pride, or self-love, for one of the enduring scars of abuse is self-blame or self-hatred. It is common for both child and adult victims to blame themselves when harmed. Self-blame is a major cause and reinforcer of "surplus powerlessness," for it successfully deflects attention away from the real problems.¹⁸ Self-hatred continues to afflict the victim and protect the perpetrator.

you taught me so well
to hate myself,
my body,
that i don't need you anymore
to hurt me,
fuck me physically
or emotionally.
i do very well on my own now.¹⁹

Abusers count on this self-loathing for their protection. As one victim said to her abuser years later, "You're damn lucky I didn't commit suicide. . . . But you really didn't worry about that—you knew I'd been brought up a good Christian, that I would take a good share of the guilt on myself, that I would feel that I was supposed to suffer because I was so sinful."²⁰

Whether it is called shame, guilt, or low self-esteem, self-blame and self-hatred are the most commonly reported long-term effects of abuse. And

it is this more than anything else that is bound up in victims' experience with the notion of original sin. Brought up to believe they are inherently evil, they are all too willing to believe they are worthless and deserving of the abuse as punishment. "Would I ever be clean again? I didn't feel I was worth anything, and I didn't think I ever would be if I lived."²¹ "Somehow, I decided, it must have been my fault. If I had said no, if I had been a better child, if I had not been tainted with evil, it wouldn't have happened."²² This is sometimes manifested in its mirror image as the constant and hopeless search for redemption from one's own unworthiness through stellar behavior.²³

Rather than speak of sin as pride or self-love to victims, we should speak of it as distortion of the self's boundaries. If men are acculturated to inflate the self, expand its boundaries to annex at will, women are taught to deflate the self, eliminate its boundaries through enmeshment. Retaining no clear sense of themselves as individuals apart from their relationships, they become diffused. Consequently, they suffer not from pride but from what can be called lack of integrity, insufficient individuation, uncreative self-definition and self-constitution, "hiding," or "flight from responsibility."²⁴ We are not all moved "without knowing it by an imperious will to power which brooks no obstacle" (including our neighbor if she is in our way).²⁵ Powerlessness as well as power corrupts.²⁶ Powerlessness corrupts women by tempting us to lose ourselves in others.

It is important, therefore, for women to develop a sense of power as action and a strong sense of themselves as responsible individuals and to learn appropriate ways to love themselves.²⁷ Because of this the popular contemporary notion of sin as alienation, used by liberal, neo-orthodox, and feminist theologians alike, is also not helpful to victims.²⁸ It is altogether too vague to be of much help.²⁹ And, it connotes a static, passive condition that does not do justice to the active exploitive structures of a society built for the strong against the vulnerable. As an adult victim-survivor of child sexual abuse pointed out to me, it does not encourage victims to separate from their victimizers in healthy ways and it contributes to blaming the victim. By implying that the desired state is one of reconciliation, it suggests that any victim who is struggling to create a separate identity for herself is wrong. By implying that all participation in the condition of alienation is wrong, it casts the blame equally on perpetrator and victim.

The notion of sin as diffusion or loss of the self is also problematic for victims, for disassociation (and its extreme form, the splitting of the self into multiple personalities) and hiding are important survival techniques in situations of abuse. Maya Angelou reports in her account of being raped by her stepfather that when she refused to be the child her family knew, they called her impudent and sullen. She in turn retreated into a place "without will or consciousness." "Into this cocoon I crept."³⁰ As

another child victim of sexual abuse records, "I begged God to make me never-been."³¹

Should we retain the notion of sin as pride or self-love for perpetrators? This, too, may not be helpful, for a number of reasons. First, as many studies have shown, abusive behavior arises out of low self-esteem. Second, rather than focus on sin as self-love, it might be more accurate to speak of it as the perversion of love for another into false love or sentimentality. Judith Herman notes how often incest perpetrators offer excuse for their behavior by saying that they did it out of love for their daughters.³² Third, this false love arises from a trained inability to relate to others respectfully and from a fear of others.³³ The result is that the person becomes an isolated ego unrelated to others through bonds of care and obligation and becomes unable even to recognize the other as distinct from self. This may be described more accurately as the transgression of boundaries than as self-love or pride.

Alice Miller points to the destructive dynamics and consequences of such transgression by distinguishing between a healthy narcissism, in which the person is "genuinely alive, with free access to the true self and his [*sic*] authentic feelings," and narcissistic disorders, "with the true self's 'solitary confinement' within the prison of the false self."³⁴ This negative sense of the self as abstract and isolated, lacks the healthy sense of self-preservation and self-definition of which we were speaking earlier. Rather, there is a lack of recognition of other as other and consequent use of the other as an object for the satisfaction of the ego's desires or as a means to one's private ends. In Buber's terms, this kind of person exists only as an ego in relation to "its" rather than as an "I" in relation to "Thous." Thus, although perpetrators trained to be egos will love, their love will be distorted into use of others for the satisfaction of their own needs. As Toni Morrison says, "Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly."³⁵ This narcissistic disordering of the self necessarily excludes care in a way that healthy narcissism does not. Judith Herman has spoken of this isolation and its tendency to lead to the destruction of others:

"As long as fathers retain their authoritative role, they cannot take part in the tasks or the rewards of parenthood. They can never know what it means to share a work of love on the basis of equality, or what it means to nurture the life of a new generation. When men no longer rule their families, they may learn for the first time what it means to belong to one."³⁶

The transgression of boundaries through narcissistic disorders and diffusion of boundaries because of low self-esteem interrupt the caring process by denying the other as other—the first by running over it, the second by failing to set a limit to it. While these different manifestations

... men and women are significant, it is also important to note their common roots and consequences. Instead of defining sin as pride, self-love, or evil self-hatred, perhaps a more comprehensive and descriptive definition is of sin as distortions of the boundaries of the self, through transgression or diffusion, that lead to lack of genuine care.

SIN AS LACK OF CONSENT TO VULNERABILITY

The final popular traditional definition of sin that has proved harmful to victims is that of sin as concupiscence. Our longstanding association of sin and sexuality has focused on sin individualistically rather than relationally and has contributed to blaming the victim by identifying women as conspirators with the powers of this "lower realm" and exonerating men as helpless victims of uncontrollable impulses. Instead of defining sin in these terms, we should speak of it in terms of our distorted relationship to weakness, vulnerability, and dependence. Just as Miller distinguishes between healthy narcissism and narcissistic disorders, Albert Memmi distinguishes between healthy and pathological dependencies. According to him, our daily dependencies (on nature, our bodies, other selves) are an unavoidable fact of our existence that is itself neutral if not positive. And yet, this fact seems to be a problem for us, a source of anxiety, for we find it hard to reconcile our existence as at once free and dependent. Though we should consent to these dependencies and work toward ways to meet them justly and authentically, and integrate them with our freedom, we often resent them and dread the feelings that they stir in us.³⁷

As we saw with the distortion of boundaries, the distorted relationship to dependence is manifested differently in men and women, perpetrators and victims. Men tend to "solve the problem of dependence by dominating women and women solve it by subjecting themselves to men."³⁸ Trained to ignore, deny, and fear their own dependence, vulnerability, and fragility (often understood as impotence), many men (and women) learn contempt for whatever is weak. This contempt often leads to the abuse of their power, authority, or force to punish or nullify a vulnerable one. This may explain in part why batterers often become enraged at the sight of their pregnant partners and direct their blows at their victims' bellies. Morrison unravels the perpetrators' complex relationships to vulnerability in her description of Cholly Breedlove's unholy mixture of hatred and tenderness, revulsion and attraction toward his young daughter just before he rapes her for the first time:

She was washing dishes. Her small back hunched over the sink. Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or what he felt. Then he became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt the discomfort dissolve into pleasure. The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence.³⁹

Later, describing the role that sacrificial victims play in building up the false strength of all of us in society fearful of our weakness, she says:

All of us—who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity corrupted us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength.⁴⁰

Alice Miller confirms this analysis by calling contempt "the weapon of the weak and a defense against one's own despised and unwanted feelings," and identifying "the fountainhead of all contempt, all discrimination, as the more or less conscious, uncontrolled, and secret exercise of power over the child by the adult, which is tolerated by society."⁴¹ In the words of one victim, "the crucifixion was a violent killing of 'God-Made-Vulnerable.' I understand the tearing of the temple curtain. I understand the tearing in the soul of a raped child. It is the same violation of vulnerability."⁴²

What of women's efforts to solve the problem of dependence by subjecting themselves to men?⁴³ Victims also speak of "contempt for the needy small self I was."⁴⁴ Instead of using this contempt to fuel domination, however, victims use it to fuel their escape into false dependence, overdependence. Instead of resolving their anxiety about the dynamic tension between freedom and dependence by absolutizing their freedom in the power of domination over another who is more vulnerable than they, they resolve the tension by forfeiting their freedom in subjecting themselves totally to the provider.

The slip from dependence into subjection is no more inevitable for women than the slip from dependence into domination is for men. It seems to be the case, however, that no one in our culture, male or female, is taught to consent to the inevitable vulnerabilities and dependencies of our life. Instead we learn contempt for it, which leads us to violate it because it threatens us, or to escape into it because it scares us. Both distortions, power (domination, coercion) and powerlessness (subjection, abdication of power), corrupt. Perhaps, then, it would be more accurate to speak of sin as a distortion of the dynamic tension between freedom and dependence, or the lack of consent to the dependence and fragility of our lives. Perhaps if both men and women acknowledged their particular distortions of this tension and their need to resolve this anxiety in more healthful ways, we could reach an "arrangement based not on force and deception but on consensual reciprocal dependence."⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

An apt metaphor for sin and evil is that of the Hydra, a mythical monster that grew two new heads for every one Hercules severed. Depending on the situation and the perspective of the participant, sin is

described as distortion of feeling (or lack of moral sensitivity); distortion of the relationship of trust or betrayal of loyalty; distortion of boundaries (or lack of care); or distortion of the dependence/freedom dynamic (or lack of consent to our vulnerabilities). Since we need all of this language to speak adequately of this part of our experience, I do not find it useful to reduce sin to a single root metaphor.

By calling attention to this variety of destructiveness in human relationships I do not mean to suggest that human beings are only sinful and capable of doing evil. That would continue to foster the low self-esteem associated with victimization of the vulnerable. I believe that the capacity of human beings to do good and to repair the effects of evil by transforming them into good is co-original with this sinfulness. My stress on the many ways we go astray as we travel together the path toward greater, deeper, and more just relatedness is intended to point out the urgent need for finding and creating a variety of ways to combat these destructive powers. It is also intended to point toward the multifarious ways God graces the world: through creating new possibilities, healing broken hearts, judging insensitivity and harm, raising up those cast down by society, liberating those bound by self-hatred, setting free those imprisoned in their egos, and sustaining in life those who are battered and worn. Unless my comments on sin and evil here are understood in this broader context of God's gracing of the world through justice and love and humankind's active and voluntary participation in that gracing, they will hinder more than help those struggling to free the world of the victimization of the vulnerable.

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Part 5

HEALING, LIBERATING, AND SANCTIFYING GRACE

Introduction to Part 5

Broadly speaking, grace is that which delights. It is that freely given power by which God moves the world toward wholeness (*shalom*) through justice and mercy. That freely given power, sometimes called "original justice" or "original righteousness," refers both to God and to human beings who participate in moving the world toward wholeness. The free gift of grace must be received freely. To be grace at all it must be accepted by a partner capable of participating in this work of salvation. Grace as the divine empowering of human beings (and of all creaturely and natural life) to live and work for a just and loving world has traditionally been spoken of as sanctification, the process of being made and making holy/whole.

Since the sixteenth century, sanctification has often been overwhelmed by an emphasis on justification; particularly though not exclusively among Protestants. Luther's discovery of justification as the forgiveness of sins by God of the sinning and sinful human being greatly influenced this trend. His anxiety that he could not ever earn God's approval through works was assuaged by his insight that justification was "by grace through faith." This insight became the foundation for a new Christianity that witnessed to the power of God alone to declare the sinner righteous and worthy.

Feminist, Black, and Latin American theologians of liberation have questioned the prevailing emphasis on grace as forgiveness of sins, because they believe that what most urgently needs repair is not the sins of individuals but the systemic evils of societies (see chapters 6, 7, and 11 for discussions of systemic evil). They speak of grace as the divine empowering that heals the external and internal wounds inflicted on individuals and peoples by structures of oppression and as the divine empowering that liberates peoples from the bondage of systemic evil. Leonardo Boff, in his *Liberating Grace*, emphasizes the divine empowering

4. Carlos J. Mond de Andrade, *Antologia Poética*, 8th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1975), 12 (trans. by Westhelle).
5. "An die Nachgeborenen" (1938), in *Bertold Brechts Gedichte und Lieder* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, n.d.), 158.
6. César Vallejo, *Obras Completas VIII: Poemas Humanos* (Barcelona: Laia, 1977), 87.
7. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 173.
8. Alejo Carpentier, *Tientos y Diferencias* (Buenos Aires: Calicanto, 1976).
9. German Arciniegas, *Latin America: A Cultural History*, trans. Joan MacLean (New York: Knopf, 1970), 384-403, 424-27. See also Harold E. Davis, *Latin American Thought* (London: Free Press, 1974), 97-134.
10. Ernst Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), 61.
11. Ernst Bloch, *Freiheit und Ordnung* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 75-79.
12. According to John B. Cobb, Jr., this would be Whitehead's theological solution for the problem of transcendence and immanence without appealing to a God that is ideally above us. See Cobb's *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 203-14.
13. John Reumann, *Creation and New Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1973), 95.
14. See Edith L. B. Turner, "Encounter with Neurobiology: The Response of Ritual Studies," *Zygon* 21, no. 2 (1986): 219-32.
15. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Dietz, 1947), 1:192; see also 1:57; 3:723, 728, *passim*.
16. For further elaboration see my article "Labor: A Suggestion for Rethinking the Way of the Christian," *Word & World* 6, no. 2: 194-206.
17. *Hexaemeron*, 1.7. We may have problems with this analogy because of P's use of the verb *bara'*, which has God as its exclusive subject. But Claus Westerman, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 114, comments that although it is "of utmost significance that this word *bara'* occurs in the Old Testament only with God as its subject . . . [it] is an exaggeration . . . [to] say that the biblical theology of Creation is contained in the notion behind *bara'* . . . and the exaggeration becomes obvious when we see that the priestly writing also uses the simple word *make* in the same sense."
18. See my article quoted in note 16, 204.
19. Marx, *Kapital*, 1:741. For an interpretation along these lines of the Cain and Abel story, see Gunter A. Wolff, "Una Historia de Luta entre o Pastor Abel e o Agricultor Cain," *Tempo e Presença* 182 (1983): 22-24.
20. This is not the place to discuss the progressive disappearance of the worker as the one who intervenes directly in nature. The technological revolution is changing the characteristics of labor. But this change does not make human beings independent of nature—it only amplifies the distance between a need and the product for satisfying that need. This distance dramatizes and complicates the metabolic process, but in no sense eliminates it. An ethics of labor is therefore even more necessary than ever. Technological advances have blurred the metabolic criteria we need to work out questions that address both human justice and ecology.
21. John Leslie, "Anthropic Principle, World Ensemble, Design," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1982): 141-51.
22. A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 67-68.
23. For an introduction and summary of the debate see Philip Hefner, "The Creation" as the fourth locus of *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols., ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 1:323-39.
24. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1976), 15.
25. *Isto É*, 12 October 1977.
26. I am relying here on Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 145-55.
27. Reumann, *Creation*, 89-99.
28. Segundo, *The Community Called Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 7.

Chapter 10

1. The process of aboriginal land claims can be followed in the Native American press, such as *Akwesasne Notes*. For an example of a specific case, see *A Song from Sacred Mountain*, ed. Anita Parlow (Lakota Nation: Oglala Lakota Legal Rights Fund, 1983).
2. This is not from Seathl's famous speech but from a letter written the following year to President Franklin Pierce. See *Native American Testimony*, ed. Peter Nabokov (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 107-8.
3. Frank Waters and Oswald White Bear Fredericks, *The Book of the Hopi* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 5, 12.
4. The *adam* (human being) is created out of the *adamah* (earth) in Genesis 2, but this rather striking word play is only treated in passing by most commentators as merely obvious.
5. See, for example, the collection of theological statements about the land published by the American Lutheran Church: *The Land: Statements and Actions of the American Lutheran Church* (1978-1982) which deals with the land and those who tend it (available through Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis).
6. *A Song from Sacred Mountain*, 3.
7. This distinction between temporal and spatial in Native American and immigrant cultures has been insightfully addressed by Vine Deloria, Jr., in *God is Red* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1973).
8. Sydney Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 5-7.
9. This is from the famous speech delivered at the signing of the Treaty of Medicine Creek, 1854. For the text, see *I Have Spoken: American History through the Voices of the Indians*, ed. Virginia I. Armstrong (Chicago: Swallow, 1971) 89ff.
10. S. Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, 5.
11. Ernest Thompson Seton, *The Gospel of the Red Man: An Indian Bible* (Los Angeles: Willig, 1948) 66.
12. Quoted from *I Have Spoken*, ed. V. Armstrong, 110.
13. Quoted from *Native American Testimony*, ed. P. Nabokov, 108.

Chapter 11

1. June Jordan, "Poem About My Rights," in her collection *Passion: New Poems*, 1977-80 (Boston: Beacon, 1980), 89.
2. Barbara Chester, "The Statistics About Sexual Violence," in *Sexual Assault and Abuse: A Handbook for Clergy and Religious Professionals*, ed. Mary D. Pellauer, Barbara Chester, and Jane Boyajian (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 10-16.
3. E. N. Sargent, *The African Boy* (New York: Collier, 1963), 44.
4. Joy Bussert, *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethics of Empowerment* (New York: Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America, 1986); Rita-Lou Clarke, *Pastoral Care and Battered Women* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 21ff.
5. Marie Marshall Fortune, *Sexual Violence, the Unmentionable Sin: An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim, 1983), 213-15; Clarke, *Battered Women*, 77-82.
6. Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 195-200.
7. I borrowed this term from Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).
8. Paul Ricoeur, "Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (Fall, 1985): 635-48.
9. Michael Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness: The Psychodynamics of Everyday Life and the Psychology of Individual and Social Transformation* (Oakland, CA: Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 1987), 152.
10. *Ibid.*, 153. See also Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in her *Making the Connections: Feminist Essays on Social Ethics* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 3-21.

11. Mary D. Pellauer, "Moral Callousness and Moral Sensitivity: Violence Against Women," in *Sexual Assault and Abuse*, 36.
12. Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, trans. Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 95.
13. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square, 1970), 158.
14. Martha Janssen, *Silent Scream: I Am a Victim of Incest* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 18.
15. Lark d'Helen, "Briefly," in *Voices in the Night: Women Speaking About Incest*, ed. Toni A. H. McNaron and Yarrow Morgan (Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis, 1982), 146.
16. Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, 319–20.
17. Margaret Farley, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).
18. Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness*, 41.
19. Tracy Nagurski, "To Daddy," *Voices in the Night*, 157–58.
20. Nagurski, *Voices in the Night*, 146.
21. *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, ed. Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 249.
22. Victim of Brother Abuse, "Tamar and Amnon Revisited," *Daughters of Sarah* 13 (September/October 1987): 11.
23. See, for example, *I Never Told Anyone*, 136.
24. See Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 90 (1960): 100–112; Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980); Susan Nelson Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings* 65 (1982): 316–27; and H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 137–38.
25. Paul Tournier, *The Violence Within* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 154; see also 154–59.
26. For this theme, see Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness*, 2–17, and Elizabeth Janeway, *Powers of the Weak* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1981).
27. This is not to be understood as autonomy, for it involves a continuing awareness of our ability and need to care for others in healthful ways. See Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 174ff.; and Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon, 1976), 60–73.
28. See, for example, Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 79–80, where she speaks of sin as "alienation, brokenness, and estrangement" and "rupture of relationship." Later she shifts her language to "violation of right relationship" (83–87).
29. Albert Memmi, for example, in his *Dependence* (trans. Philip A. Facey [Boston: Beacon, 1984] 5–6), observes that there is a large difference between the alienation a dependent person experiences in relation to her/his provider and the alienation a subjected person experiences in relation to her/his dominator.
30. Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Bantam, 1969), 73.
31. Ella Radke, *Child Cry*, unpublished manuscript.
32. Judith Lewis Herman, with Lisa Hirschman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 22–35.
33. Memmi, *Dependence*, 150.
34. Miller, *Drama of the Gifted Child: How Narcissistic Parents Form and Deform the Emotional Lives of Their Gifted Children*, trans. Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981), ix.
35. Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, 159–60.
36. Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, 218.
37. Memmi, *Dependence*. See also the argument in Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
38. Memmi, *Dependence*, 155.
39. Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, 127.
40. *Ibid.*, 159.
41. Miller, *Drama of the Gifted Child*, 69.

42. Radke, *Child Cry*.
43. This way of framing the issue comes from Memmi, who says, "The history of the species has been that men solve the problem of dependence by dominating women and women solve it by subjecting themselves to men" (*Dependence*, 155). This is not always the case however. Jean Grimshaw has argued in *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* that some feminists, especially early feminists such as de Beauvoir and Daly, reacted to male expectations of women as dependent by rejecting all dependence or need and imitating male forms of independence, hoping for a life "uncontaminated by dependencies" (142ff.).
44. *I Never Told Anyone*, ed. Bass and Thornton, 182.
45. Memmi, *Dependence*, 155. Jean Baker Miller suggests that society as a whole might learn this consent from women's often positive acknowledgement of vulnerability, weakness and helplessness that does not lead to subjection but to the release of greater creativity of life (*Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 29–38).

Introduction to Part 5

1. Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 3.
2. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

Introduction to Part 5.A

1. *Womanist* is a term coined by Alice Walker. "Womanist 1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of 'girlish,' i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish,' i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one." In *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi–xii.
2. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 143.
3. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968), 88, 94.
4. See Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Haskins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
5. See Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5* (New York: Macmillan, 1956); and *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960).
6. Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 191.
7. John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 171.

Chapter 13

1. I am especially grateful to Kelly Brown, Beverly Harrison, Pat Shechter, Ann Wetherilt, Delores Williams, and students in my christology classes.
2. All theology is to some extent a reaction against an author's perceptions of earlier theological distortions, excesses, or errors. For example, the "crisis" theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) reacted against the relativism of such liberals as Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1989). Liberation theologian Dorothee Soelle (1928–) reacted in one of her first books, *Political Theology*, trans. John Shelly (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), against the individualism of existential theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976).
3. For helpful discussions of dualism as a theological and ethical problem, see Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, esp. 72–92; Joan L. Griscom, "On Healing the Nature/History Split in Feminist Thought," 85–98; and Toinette M. Eugene, "While Love Is Unfashionable," in *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston, 1985), 121–41.
4. I am aware that for many "Christian women of different colors, cultures, and creeds" Jesus/Christ is redemptive in that he "saves" them from a sense of personhood. From the perspective of liberation theology, however, redemption (or salvation