

## 5

*Christian "Virtues"  
and Recovery from  
Child Sexual Abuse*

SHEILA A. REDMOND

On a theoretical level, Christianity unanimously condemns sexual violence, rape, for example, as morally, ethically, and religiously unacceptable. But sexual violence does occur within specific Christian settings. Witness the explosive and controversial phenomenon of children being sexually abused by members of the Roman Catholic priesthood, a problem, as is child sexual abuse generally, that is finally "coming out of the closet" and making headlines in both Canada and the United States. In such cases of child sexual abuse, the negative aspects of certain religious symbols can have an overwhelming impact on the developing ego of Christian children and cause subsequent difficulty in their functioning as adults. However, this question does not appear to be addressed by either those in psychology of religion or in articles relating to child abuse in religious publications.<sup>1</sup> My concern here is with those victims of child sexual abuse who grow up within a Christian environment.

Anyone who was sexually abused as a child has a difficult time resolving the issue of the coercion that is inherent in the abusive situation. A woman or man raised in a Christian environment and sexually abused as a child may be particularly vulnerable to an incomplete resolution of that sexual abuse. It is seldom, if ever, asked whether religious factors themselves play a role in the creation of the illnesses from which these children later suffer. Is there something systemic to a particular religion, in this case, Christianity, that allows for a society

*Christian "Virtues" and Child Sexual Abuse*

with a substructure of sexual violence toward children, thus making survival after abuse a difficult proposition?

The role of Christian teachings in this area is in need of open discussion. The search for contributing Christian factors to child sexual abuse is involved and intricate. I attempt here to begin the search by looking at one aspect of the problem. What happens to the children who have grown up in a Christian environment and who have been sexually assaulted by a priest, father, relative, or family friend—people whom they have been raised to revere, respect, and obey? Do the images of Christianity hinder their recovery from this devastating abuse? To begin addressing some of these questions, the impact of sexual abuse on the child must be discussed. Then I will focus on five specific attitudes Christianity holds as a fundamental part of its heritage and the role these attitudes play in hampering a successful recovery from the assault.

THE EFFECTS OF CHILD  
SEXUAL ABUSE

The premature introduction to sexual activity through nonconsensual relationships can have a long-lasting impact on the growth and development of the child in her or his maturation to adulthood.<sup>2</sup> Sexual relations between an adult and a child are inappropriate and developmentally destructive for many reasons. Inherent in nonexploitative sexual relationships is the idea of equality, consent, and mutuality.<sup>3</sup> This type of relationship is not possible for a child in relation to an adult.<sup>4</sup> The information and the desire to carry on an adult type of sexual relationship are lacking. In this kind of relationship, the adult demands that the child meet needs that should be met by the adult's peers, and expects adult responses and understanding from a child who is developmentally unequipped for such responses. The child is forced into pseudo-maturity by the assault. ● On the basis of experience alone, she or he is ill-equipped to assess the potential dangers of adult/child sexual relationships. The child may have a difficult time determining just what is wrong with this relationship, why she or he feels uncomfortable. A child needs warmth, affection, and love; and confusion is created by the perpetrator in this respect. "An adult can see that the daughter's need for a father's affection does not cancel his culpability for sexually abusing her. But the child cannot resolve the conflict. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Neither the detrimental consequences for her psychosocial and psy-

osexual development nor the censure that will be applied if she attempts to repeat the behavior with other adults would be within her realm of experience.<sup>6</sup>

Long-term consequences almost inevitably surface. Even if there appears to be little immediate negative impact, depression often results. Child sexual abuse is now being discovered as one of the initial traumatic causes behind such illnesses as multiple personality disorders and eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. It is included in the history of prostitutes and of the abusers themselves. These problems can surface immediately or, if the act is blocked from memory, the impact of the abuse may not be recognizable until the teen years or even later.<sup>7</sup> Victims of child sexual abuse often show the same lack of self-esteem and inability to be involved in trusting relationships as do the children of alcoholics and children from backgrounds of physical violence.<sup>8</sup> What makes the similarity so understandable is that in almost all cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator of the act is someone the child knows, trusts, and loves. There is a betrayal of trust caused by the perpetrator's total rejection of the child's integrity as a human being.

The problems resulting from untreated child sexual abuse are devastating. It is almost impossible for the female adult who was abused to ever fully trust males or even other females. A negative self-image and feelings of inadequacy are coupled with an exaggerated sense of personal responsibility. These make up part of the developmental structure of the victim's personality. Any attempt to come to terms with the past and to overcome the effects of the abuse is a long-term project for the victim. She must go about reorganizing the involved, complex psychological structures that have been created during the intervening years of survival.

Children who have been sexually abused are often described, on the one hand, as responsible for, enjoying, or willingly participating in their own abuse.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, it is also suggested that they are completely unaffected by the adult/child sexual relationship and that it will be forgotten and have no long-lasting effects.<sup>10</sup> The rape of an adult is now viewed as an aspect of assault and battery and not as an act of uncontrollable sexual passion; its devastating impact on the ego of the victim is recognized. In that same way, the sexual abuse of children must be seen solely as a violent act—with or without physical abuse.<sup>11</sup> It is perpetrated by an adult upon one too young to consent and too

defenseless and powerless to say no.<sup>12</sup> It creates women who remain passive and victimized; it creates men who sexually abuse children and who relate to women and children from within a framework of authoritarian abuse.<sup>13</sup>

#### RECOVERY AND THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN "VIRTUES"

The process of recovery from child sexual abuse is hampered by the fact that many children do not tell anyone of the experience until long after the initial assault.<sup>14</sup> The difficulty many adults have in discussing the problem further militates against the child receiving adequate counseling after the assault has come into the open.

There are important stages in effective recovery from abuse. The child must be allowed to talk openly about the assault and her feelings, without restrictions as to what she is supposed to feel or how she is supposed to react. The child involved must be convinced that there is nothing she or he did to make this adult, who is almost always a male, behave the way he did.<sup>15</sup> (These two stages of recovery are hampered, however, by the Christian "virtues" which I will analyze in the following section.)

Children attempt to understand, and within their own limited experience find some explanation for, the world. If, as is often the case in sexual abuse, the child remains silent or is allowed to "forget," the explanations the child finds will be furnished by the empirical data of the child's environment. When that environment is Christian, the images, symbols, rules, and expectations embedded in its religious values will play a major role in determining the answers the child will integrate into her or his developing psyche and upon which she or he will base future actions. Children's experience is limited by their age and understanding of, for example, "God the Father" as a symbolic way of referring to the ineffable.<sup>16</sup> As with many other aspects of Christian symbols, the explanations of sophisticated theological thinking are barely understood by many adults, much less by children.

The question of the values of Christianity is crucial. Religious values such as suffering, martyrdom, the role of the female, the role of the child, attitudes toward sexuality and marriage are all prescribed and proscribed in certain ways within the Christian religious structure. Children learn five virtues: (1) the value of suffering; (2) the virtue of forgiveness; (3) the necessity of remaining sexually pure (especially for

little girls); (4) the fact that they are in need of redemption; and, most important, (5) the value that is placed on their obedience to authority figures. I will now discuss these five points from the point of view of the Christian child who has been sexually assaulted by someone she or he knows.

#### *Suffering as Desirable*

The justification or honoring of suffering can have a negative impact on the victims of child sexual abuse. The value placed on suffering in the Christian context has at least three important aspects. First, since the Christian god is just and merciful, if one has suffered, one has sinned. Suffering is part of the punishment meted out to those who disobey. Second, suffering and repentance teach humility and are the way back to forgiveness from this Christian god. Third, martyrdom, which is an extreme form of suffering, holds a special place of honor within the Christian tradition.

The impact of a sexual attack on the child makes the victim look for the answers to the question of why she or he has been made to suffer. Children are capable of drawing logical conclusions from the data they have been given.<sup>17</sup> Christian children are told that their god is just, merciful, and caring. If they are good, then bad things won't happen to them. A Christian child is unlikely to question the true value of either of the above statements when a bad thing happens. The logical conclusion is drawn: "I am a bad child." The child may decide that she was disobedient, did not say her prayers, was disrespectful, or lied. She may have been too proud or wasn't nice enough to her siblings. She must be bad or evil, and she certainly does not deserve to be loved.<sup>18</sup>

Victims of sexual assault suffer from self-destruction of the ego. One suffers because one has done something bad and is being punished. If one becomes truly repentant and humble, gives over one's soul to the control of the deity, then everything will be all right. Implicitly, the assault is destroying the integrity of the self. What better way to empty the soul and become humble than by being sexually assaulted as a child? This attitude toward suffering can then be used as a reason for not admitting the damage caused by the molestation. One can be blessed by stoically suffering this type of assault.

The martyrdom of females has often occurred in the context of sexual violence. The emulation of eleven-year-old Maria Goretti is a good recent example. When Maria became a saint in 1950, the Pope

spoke of her as a model for all Roman Catholic girls, the St. Agnes of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> The mythology surrounding Maria Goretti is fraught with the best examples (or worst, depending on one's perspective) of the emulation of suffering, forgiveness, and sexual purity. According to her authorized biographers, Maria suffered just like Jesus and the Virgin.<sup>20</sup> Not only did this girl become a saint but her suffering was known by God before it happened. In fact, God had destined it. Her assailant should be happy that he had occasioned the wonderful thing which would happen to her—her sainthood. Maria Goretti was murdered because she refused to be raped; through suffering as she did, one might achieve some holiness. While Christians may explicitly condemn the act that brought about Maria's sainthood, her martyrdom teaches that suffering and the acts that caused the suffering are signs that she had been blessed.<sup>21</sup> Thus sexual assault, particularly if the actual loss of virginity is avoided, can be a blessing in disguise.

#### *Forgiveness*

Reactions to the sexual assault include anger, hurt, betrayal, and guilt. It is clear from the therapies of women who have been sexually assaulted as children that a necessary component of resolving the trauma of the assault is articulation of rage, anger, and hatred at being used, at the powerlessness of their positions when they were children. This mitigates against any demand for too early an emphasis on forgiveness and understanding the perpetrator and his crime as anything but unjustified and unforgivable. Forgiveness for the perpetrator is not a requirement for resolution of the abuse, and lack of forgiveness does not entail the need for revenge.<sup>22</sup>

One of the basic tenets of Christian thinking is the concept of forgiveness. One has to forgive one's enemies, turn the other cheek, forgive seventy times seven or, as interpreted, always. One also must seek forgiveness for what one has done wrong. True repentance is the only way to forgiveness. Again, the case of Maria Goretti contains an example of the Christian response. Maria forgave her assailant immediately and was repeatedly asked, despite her enormous pain, whether she did so. For the child who has been abused, her feelings must be accepted as they are exhibited and allowed to run their natural course. For the adult who is trying to overcome the earlier abuse, the requirements of reality, that is, hatred and anger, may be hampered if she or he is a devout Christian.

## SHEILA A. REDMOND

*Christian "Virtues" and Child Sexual Abuse*

How does one truly repent when one has done nothing wrong? One must find something to repent and be forgiven for.

*Sexual Purity*

Child sexual assault denies that there is any positive value to the child's sexuality. Eventually the child has to realize that the crime in question was not related to her sexuality but that the sexual relationship was the means through which the adult most easily made use of the child for his own benefit. The utter selfishness and coercive nature of the act must be finally understood by the child.

Traditionally, Christian doctrine deemphasizes the importance of the body and focuses on the sexual act itself and the female body as the bearer of the worst sin. For females raised in the Roman Catholic tradition, the focus on sex, via adoration of the Virgin Mary, begins early. Those who hear of Maria Goretti are told that she died rather than allow herself to be sullied by the sex act. To quote one of her biographers,

Maria's martyrdom was not an impromptu affair, but something well prepared for. But Maria Goretti did something more still: rather than take part in one single act of sin—an act for which she could have got absolution in five minutes in her next confession—she let herself be literally hacked to death.<sup>23</sup>

She wasn't "spoiled goods," something that the doctors checked out at the hospital immediately so that they could reassure her mother that the worst had not happened to her. At least Maria had died a virgin, much to her mother's relief. If you were assaulted as a child and you did not fight off the attacker to the death, you must be guilty of some sin, some inherent weakness; it must be your fault.

As it is told in *Crusade: The Bible Retold for Catholic Children*, the story of the creation of Eve underscores another aspect of the problem.

God put Adam into a deep sleep, and took out one of the man's ribs. He made a girl from the rib, and brought her to Adam. . . . Ever since Adam's time, when a young man grows up, he leaves his father and mother and takes a wife. A girl who becomes a wife leaves her father and her mother, and lives with her husband.<sup>24</sup>

There is an accompanying picture of a female child standing side by side with a full-grown, bearded man who appears to be about thirty.<sup>25</sup>

Eve, the woman with whom human women are to be identified, looks like a prepubescent female, without breasts, pubic hair, or anything that might identify her as a woman. This Eve was the cause of humanity's fall from grace, the bringer of lust into the world. And in this children's Bible, she looks no older than twelve. The message is simple. If I look like Eve, I too must bring about lust. I must have caused this man to do this to me.

*The Need for Redemption*

A Jules Feiffer cartoon aptly describes one facet of the child's world. A little child is talking:

I used to believe I was a good girl. Until I lost my doll and found out it wasn't lost, my big sister stole it. And my mother told me she was taking me to the zoo only it wasn't the zoo it was school. And my father told me he was taking me to the circus, only it wasn't the circus, it was the dentist. So that's how I found out I wasn't good. Because if I was good why would all these good people want to punish me?<sup>26</sup>

Children assume that adults are "good" and right. Because they depend on adult good will, they can easily develop a sense of guilt and responsibility disproportionate to their actions, particularly if this sense of responsibility is environmentally reinforced. If a little girl who grows up thinking she is good can develop the idea that she is bad, what happens to a child who grows up knowing she or he is in need of redemption?

The need for redemption is at the heart of the Christian belief system or "symbolic world."<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther felt that it was better that a child should be murdered than live in the world with the assumption that it is a good and glorious place,<sup>28</sup> and have its soul destroyed.<sup>29</sup> In many forms of Christianity, children are baptized for the removal of some genetically implanted evil.<sup>30</sup> The focus on the need for redemption creates a sense of unworthiness and, eventually, guilt. For the child who is sexually abused, this abuse can truly prove that she or he is in need of redemption. It proves that the child is unworthy of being loved, of being happy. This halts movement toward resolution of the abuse, and the solution is found in the internalization of someone else's crime. As one woman put it, in recalling her own abuse, "He started abusing me when I was five years old. This was when I was beginning my religious training which taught me that women were vessels of sin. It was my sin of incest that made him [i.e., Jesus] hang on the cross."<sup>31</sup>

the cross to die, uncomplaining. John's Jesus teaches that one must accept willingly whatever the father does, for whatever the father does is right, justifiable, and must be obeyed. What made the crucifixion right and unquestionable is that the end (salvation of the human race because of its need for redemption<sup>37</sup>) justified the means (pedocide). The father is the exemplar on earth of the image of the father god in heaven. It is not difficult to see how it might follow, then, that hitting a child, locking a child in a closet, or depriving her or him of sensory needs can be justified "for their own good"—the salvation of the child's soul.<sup>38</sup> This kind of religious symbolism tolerates violence in family life and justifies, in particular, violence against children by fathers and other authority figures. If it can justify this kind of violence, it is not far removed to say that it can tolerate, even if it does not condone, child sexual abuse, particularly if some good results.<sup>39</sup>

The Christian parent is the ultimate authority figure next to god, "him"self. In Roman Catholicism, the priest virtually stands in for this god. Witness the angry statement from the father of a victim of priest assault in Louisiana: "He's only ten years old, he thought the priest was God."<sup>40</sup> If a child's priest, minister, or father abuses her or him, it is only natural for that abused child, who is raised in a Christian environment, to find the blame within her or himself. Within the framework of patriarchal Christianity, the child is almost powerless to reject the abuse, she cannot tell anyone just how evil she really is, and therefore is severely hampered in ever fully resolving the damage done by the assault through the rejection of the internalized guilt. Christianity has such a vested interest in the maintenance of the patriarchal family ideal or benign dictatorship model on the personal and institutional level that often Christians, too, would rather blame children than force personal, parental responsibility onto the father or any other adult male. In a case of incest involving a church elder, other members of the Christian community spoke on the father's behalf in court and accused his daughters of seducing their father. The abysmal response of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to the assault of children by their priests also forces us to recognize that there is a serious problem not just in the secular society, but within the Christian ethos itself.

### CONCLUSION

Many of the virtues of Christianity make it difficult, if not impossible, for the child who has suffered from the effects of sexual abuse to

### *Obedience to Authority Figures: The Patriarchal Family Ideal*

Underlying the whole issue of recovery from child sexual abuse, and child abuse in general,<sup>42</sup> is the question of the attitude toward authority figures. Children must be taught that they have the right to say no, the right to question authority, and the right to disobey. The nature of the childhood of the human animal is such that the child is dependent on the good will of the adult—parent, teacher, relative, or stranger. She or he is dependent on the adult for nourishment, shelter, and, most important, love if she or he can be expected to attain the status of a healthy well-functioning adult. A child must learn to say no: not just no to a stranger, but no to a father, mother, uncle, teacher, priest, or minister. A necessary component for the successful resolution of sexual abuse and its aftermath is this kind of reorientation of attitudes toward authority figures.

Christianity constantly underscores the value of obedience to authority figures, especially parental or quasi-parental figures. The commandment "Thou shalt honor thy father and mother that thy days may be long on this earth" has been seen by Alice Miller as being at the root of Western violence and its attitude toward children.<sup>43</sup> Children are raised to respect their elders, obey their parents. Daddy and Mommy; Uncle Jimmy and grandpa; teacher, minister, and priest know best. The adult is always right.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, children assume either (1) that what the trusted father or parental figure is asking is all right or even that what is asked is part of appropriate child/adult behavior or (2) that if she or he refuses, then the love of the adult will be lost.

The foundation for this attitude toward authority is found in the anthropomorphic conceptions of the Christian deity as male and the human relationship to this god.<sup>45</sup> Although the theological position of Christian monotheism argues that one cannot assign anthropomorphic characteristics to its god, attempts to "desex" or use multiple anthropomorphic terms for this god have met with strong resistance in much of Western Christianity.<sup>46</sup> The Christian child sees god as the heavenly father who can do no wrong. And this father god willingly sent his own child to be killed. The picture of Jesus drawn for us in the Gospel of John plays an enormous role in the minds of most Christians. This Gospel emphasizes Jesus' self-knowledge and his willingness to go to

overcome the effects of this abuse successfully and lead a rewarding existence as an adult—particularly in the area of interpersonal relationships. Whether or not there is something systemic in the Christian “symbolic world” that facilitates this kind of sexual abuse of children is a question that needs further consideration and delineation. However, it is clear that Christian beliefs do not make it easy for children who have been sexually abused to deal with the abuse. It is possible that some of the values I have discussed may at times have a certain positive connotation. However, to those who suffer the victimization of child sexual assault these same values and symbols can have such a negative impact that it is difficult to ever fully resolve the conflicts that arise from acceptance of these beliefs.

The beliefs briefly described here are part of the doctrinal fund of Christianity. They reinforce personal guilt and responsibility continuously and by various means. This has the most disastrous consequences for a child victim of sexual assault. Many people were raised in a Christian environment and also were sexually abused as children. Many still carry this child and this child's adherence to Christian beliefs around with them. Therefore, they carry around the burden of unwarranted guilt. Without frank and open discussion of the negative aspects of Christian doctrine, there will be great difficulty in resolving the lingering feelings of responsibility for a crime that has been perpetrated upon them—not a crime of sexuality but a crime that has an impact on all of us, a crime of power, coercion, and abuse.<sup>41</sup>

#### NOTES

\*A version of this paper was first delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta, November 24, 1986. I would like to thank the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their financial assistance which helped to fund my research in 1986–87.

1. There are exceptions to this point of view; however, they are not found within the mainstream of religious thought. See, e.g., D. Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents* (Toronto: CBC Learning Systems, 1971); Steele and Pollack, “A Psychiatric Study of Parents Who Abuse Infants and Small Children,” in Helfer and Kempe, *The Battered Child*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974 [1968]), 93. See K. Neufeld, “Child-Rearing, Religion, and Abusive Parents,” *Religious Education* 74(1979): 234–44, who claims to refute the comments of Steele and Pollack above. However, Neufeld actually substantiates

their claim that the religious values of the abusers (which included, among others, Catholics, Mormons, and Lutherans) were of a particularly fundamentalist type. The work of the psychoanalyst Alice Miller (*For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence*, trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983/1985]) is a primary example of a devastating explanation of the impact that strict adherence to the all-powerful Fourth (or Fifth) Commandment in the Christian religious context has had on child-rearing practices in the Western world. Note also S. Forward and C. Buck, *Betrayal of Innocence: Incest and Its Devastation* (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada, 1984[1978]), 32; and C. Bagley, “Mental Health and the In-Family Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents,” in B. Schlesinger, ed., *Sexual Abuse of Children in the 1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 37–38. Bagley discusses the work of Mimi Silbert on street prostitutes in San Francisco. She found that the majority of them came from middle-class families with a formal religious atmosphere. His reference to M. Silbert and A. Piven (“Sexual Abuse as an Antecedent to Prostitution,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 5[1981]: 407–11) does not refer to this fact. However, it is likely that this information is contained in the larger Delaney Street Foundation report of which this article is a synopsis. There are often misguided attempts to mitigate the negative impact of religious teachings by those in the religious field. The response of the Canadian Council on Justice and Corrections to the Bagley report on child sexual abuse in Canada (*Brief to the Minister of Justice Regarding “Bagley Report on Sexual Offences Against Children,”* Ottawa, November, 1985) suffers from the same problem as E. Hastings, “Child Abuse: Viewing It as a National Problem and the Church as a Resource” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, 1975). The rights and problems of the aggressor become the focus of both (see n. 15 below) and ultimately more important than the injury done to the child, although this is clearly not the intent of either.

2. Perhaps the title “The Common Secret” is even more appropriate. Ruth Kempe and Henry Kempe, who coined this phrase for child sexual abuse, were pioneers in the field of the battered child syndrome. Their recent work on child sexual abuse has led them to believe that they underestimated the impact of sexual abuse on many of the children they had treated. They now feel that, in many cases, sexual abuse was the primary and often sole initiating cause for the behavioral problems of their child patients (Ruth S. Kempe and C. Henry Kempe, *The Common Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents* [New York: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1984], 3–7). See also R. Summit, “Beyond Belief: The Reluctant Discovery of Incest,” in M. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Women's Sexual Experience: Explorations of the Dark Continent* (New York: Plenum Press, 1982), 127–50.

3. M. M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin: An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), 42–98; see n. 4 below.

4. D. Finkelhor, *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 14–22; idem, “What’s Wrong with Sex Between Adults and Children?” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 49(1979): 694–96. Bagley argues against Finkelhor’s position with regard to consensuality from the point of view of a child-rights position (“Mental Health,” 39). However, Bagley’s position is considerably weakened when read in conjunction with John Holt’s *Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974). Furthermore, the child-rights movement has been used by pedophilic groups to support their positions of, e.g., “sex before eight or else it’s too late.” The reality is they simply want to justify the adult’s right to sexually use and abuse children and to disguise their opinions under the guise of child rights advocacy. See Florence Rush, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 183–92; and Louise Armstrong, “The Cradle of Sexual Politics: Incest,” in Kirkpatrick, *Women’s Sexual Experience*, 109–25. See Joseph Shepher (*Incest: A Biosocial View*, Studies in Anthropology [Toronto: Academic Press, 1983]). This work on incest from the anthropological perspective may have profound effects on the work on child sexual abuse. Following Edward Westermarck, and through insights from his own work on kibbutz children, Shepher concludes that there is an innate aversion to incest in human beings. The incest taboo is not a creation of culture à la Lévi-Strauss and others; but rather, the aversion to incest created the family. His argument goes a long way in supporting the view that incest itself is “unnatural” and therefore destructive to the development of the human being. It would now be culture (e.g., the development of patriarchy) which created and supports sexual relationships with children as opposed to the more common idea that the culturally created incest taboo stops people from doing “what comes naturally.” See also n. 15 below.

5. L. Froula, “The Daughter’s Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History,” *Signs* 11(1986): 635.

6. R. Kempe and H. Kempe, *Common Secret*, 55–58. This case study is just one example of the problems involved in helping a child who has been trained to behave in a sexual manner.

7. Eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, which are primarily female disorders, often appear to be connected with child sexual abuse. See Miller (*For Your Own Good*, 131–32), who relates these disorders to child abuse. The child now has some form of control in an otherwise powerless situation. For an extreme case of multiple personality disorder and child sexual abuse see F. R. Schreiber, *Sibyl* (New York: Warner Books, 1973). I would argue that there is a lack of understanding of the religious dimension of the problem in the analysis as presented by Schreiber. See Silby, “Sexual Abuse.”

8. C. Black, *It Will Never Happen to Me* (Denver: M.A.C. Printing and Publications Division, 1982); “Emotional Hangover: Growing up with an Alcoholic Parent,” *McCall’s*, October 1984, pp. 161–63.

9. L. I. Tamarack, “Fifty Myths and Facts About Incest,” in Schlesinger, *Sexual Abuse*, 3–15. See also Rush, *Best Kept Secret*, 183–92.

10. Rush, *Best Kept Secret*; J. L. Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 153, and nn.; 185–86.

11. This point is extremely important since often there is no overt physical damage done to the child. Actual penetration causes damage but it is often the case that the adult/child relationship involves alternate sexual activity such as oral-genital sex, particularly with the prepubescent child.

12. The equation of sex and violence, which has too often been inherent in any discussion of sexuality in the Christian sphere, is aptly described and discussed, and some solutions offered, in Fortune, *Sexual Violence*. See particularly chap. 2, “Confusing Sexual Activity and Sexual Violence,” 14–41; and chap. 3, “Reframing Ethical Questions,” 42–98.

13. A. N. Groth with H. J. Birnbaum, *Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1985[1979]); A. N. Groth, “The Incest Offender,” in S. M. Sgroi, *Handbook of Clinical Intervention in Child Sexual Abuse* (Toronto: D. C. Heath & Co., 1984[1982]), 215–39; Rush, *Best Kept Secret*, 13–15.

14. Hence Rush’s euphemism, “best-kept secret.” See D. Finkelhor, *Sexually Victimized Children* (New York: Free Press, 1979). One of the agonizing parts of research in this area is that it is obvious that the sexual destruction of children has been recognized in certain medical circles for at least a century; e.g., in France in the nineteenth century many cases were recorded and published. See A. Tardieu, *Etudes médico-légales sur les attentats des mœurs* (Paris: J. B. Baillière et fils, 1862), in which the drawings and autopsy discussions defy description. J. M. Masson (*The Assault on Truth: Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory* [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984], 14–54) discusses Tardieu’s role in Freud’s medical training. Doctors working in the area of the battered child syndrome also bring some of this earlier material to light. It is difficult to accept the fact that countless children have suffered for years because the time was not right. In 1932, Sandor Ferenczi, as had Freud earlier (“The Aetiology of Hysteria” [1896]), indicted men as the seducers of children (“Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child,” in Masson, *Assault*, App. C, pp. 283–95); his work was summarily dismissed (Masson, *Assault*, 145–92). As has Alice Miller today, Ferenczi seems to have given far more credence and weight to the reality of the sexual, physical, or emotional pain his patients had gone through in their childhoods than did Freud. See, e.g., Sandor Ferenczi, *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis*, ed. M. Balint (New York: Basic Books, 1955). At the time, the public would never have accepted the implications of the reality of child sexual abuse. The implications for Freudian theory are only now being questioned and are violently objected to by those who cannot let go of yet

## SHEILA A. REDMOND

another "God" and his gospel truth. Ultimately, they refuse to accept the massive effect that abusive acts have on children, their perception of reality, and, as a consequence, the world they will structure in the future. See Rush, *Best Kept Secret*, 80-104; Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good*; and idem, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, trans. Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984[1981]).

15. This is a problem with incest cases, particularly when family therapy techniques that take the position that everyone is a victim are used. The daughter or son—the only one without responsibility—is lost in the family therapy. I would argue that this criticism holds in all forms of family therapy for families in which children have been abused. This type of therapy is advocated consistently in the religious context; e.g., Canadian Council on Justice and Corrections; and Hastings, "Child Abuse." For further criticism, see Herman, *Father-Daughter*, 152, 185-86; and Bagley, "Mental Health," 44-45, an apparent retraction of Bagley's earlier position on the use of integrated family therapy in incest cases and of his attitude concerning the harmful effects of incest in general. For a synopsis of his earlier "functional approach" in dealing with incest, see N. Gager and C. Schurr, *Sexual Assault: Confronting Rape in America* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1976), 42-44.

16. D. Heller, *The Children's God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

17. M. Lippman, A. M. Sharp, and F. S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 12-30.

18. The Deuteronomist conception of history found in Deuteronomy to 2 Kings is the basic foundation for the Christian view of its relationship with its god and the world. The clearest delineation of the Deuteronomist's position is found in Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975[1957]), 136-64, 348-62. The impact of the Deuteronomist's theological thinking should never be underestimated in any attempt to reshape the Christian tradition. Christianity as the new Chosen People considers itself to have inherited the relationship of the chosen people to the Yahwist god.

19. Maria Goretti was assaulted by a nineteen-year-old male relative who had already approached her several times before the final assault. She fought her rapist, was stabbed fourteen times, and died later in a hospital. She has been used most recently as a model for Catholic youth in a papal address by Pope John Paul II in 1980, "Address delivered to the young people of Catholic Action from Sengallia diocese on the modernness of Saint Maria Goretti's message," *OR(Eng)* 47(659), Nov. 24, 1980, pp. 8-9. Her shrine was rebuilt in 1979.

20. A manual on how to become a saint—die rather than be raped. The message is if you let yourself be raped, you must be a bad girl. See Maria

## Christian "Virtues" and Child Sexual Abuse

Cecilia Buehrle, *Saint Maria Goretti* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co., 1956[1950]). John Carr, *Saint Maria Goretti: Martyr for Purity* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1950[1948]). A. Ball, *Modern Saints: Their Lives and Faces* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1983), 163-73. See J. Coulson, ed., *The Saints: A Concise Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960), 323, for a concise explanation of why she was canonized; she had plenty of time to make a conscious decision between death and rape: "People like Mary Goretti . . . have an ever-present realization that lightly to surrender one's bodily integrity, even to the most compelling needs of the moment, upsets the whole rhythm of the universe." See also M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1985[1976]), 71-72; Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 23, 64-66.

21. J. A. Loftus, "Victims of Abuse as Candidates," *Review for Religious* (September-October 1986) discusses candidates for orders who were victims of child sexual abuse and points out that many people in the helping professions come from a background of family violence. Nowhere, however, does he address the problem that some of these people are actually attempting to redeem themselves for what was done to them. Given the intergenerational nature of most abusive structures, without a full resolution of the abuse perpetrated upon them, these helpers, however well-intentioned, may actually never be able to help others adequately. I would argue that if victims remain closely tied to their Christian religious values and seek to work out their past in a religious vocation, they will be more likely to perpetuate abusive situations than change them.

22. Often the perpetrator will not admit any responsibility for the act or will deny that the attack took place. This makes resolution doubly difficult but not insurmountable; see n. 13 above.

23. Carr, *Saint Maria*, 10.

24. Maryknoll Sisters, *Crusade: The Bible Retold for Catholic Children*, no. 2 (Chicago: John J. Crawley & Co., 1955), 46.

25. *Ibid.*, no. 2, 47.

26. Jules Feiffer, 1977.

27. N. Perrin and D. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History*, 2d ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982[1974]), 57-58, is one of the most succinct delineations of this idea. If the world is not evil and there is no original sin, why is there need for a redeemer? See, e.g., two recent articles for teachers in the Canadian Roman Catholic school systems, by J. Forsyth, "Canadian Catechism: Redemptive Meaning of the Cross Is Lost in One-sided Approach to 'Friendly' Religion," *CT Reporter* 9/3(1983-84): 44-46; and idem, "Redemption and Rationality: Does Catechism Play Down Dark Side of Life Struggle?" *CT Reporter* 9/4(1983-84): 34.

28. Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, comp. Ewald M. Plass

36. J. A. Phillips (*Eve: The History of an Idea* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984]) has made one of the most succinct and sound analyses of the development of god as male and father, and the impact it has had on the consciousness of a people.

37. Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 219.

38. S. Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 146-47. Ozment argues that the rise of the Protestant patriarchal unit was a positive development of the Reformation. He downplays the impact of the violent attitude toward children, which was justified religiously by the reformation movement: i.e., that it is better to err on the side of disciplining a child than not to discipline—even if it killed him. He feels that he is redressing a wrong committed by other writers on Protestant family life in the Reformation. The same kind of argument is made by J. W. Miller in "God as Father in the Bible and the Father Image in Several Contemporary Ancient Near Eastern Myths: A Comparison," *Studies in Religion* 14 (1986): 347-54. In this paper, Kahweh as father has saved the family from the horrors of the Canaanite Tiamat, Baal, and Ashtaré myths. See n. 32 above and Miller, *For Your Own Good*, for criticisms of this approach.

39. Armstrong, in talking of the society as a whole, asks probably the most pertinent question of all: "What is the nature of the powerful need on the part of so many men to preserve the permission to exploit their children sexually?" ("The Cradle of Sexual Politics," 124). Fogrebin asks the same question from a different point of view; if we justify violence against children, it is only a small step to justifying sexual use of children (*Family Politics*, 106). See also Summit, "Beyond Belief."

40. "West Fifty Seventh Street," NBC, August 1986.

41. Although its accessibility is limited by its language, there is a book in Dutch devoted solely to the topic of Christianity and incest which I recommend highly. It includes ten interviews with women survivors of incest who were raised in Christian environments; Annie Imbens and Inneke Jonker, *Godsdienst en incest* (Amersfoort, Netherlands: De Horstink, in samenwerking met de Vereniging tegen Seksuele Kinderschadeling binnen het Gezin, 1985). (*Religion and Incest* [Amersfoort, Netherlands: De Horstink in cooperation with the Society against the Sexual Abuse of Children in the Family, 1985]). Although its findings support my work, I received it too late for use in the writing of this article. There are no fast and easy answers to solving the problems of child abuse and Christianity. Cooperation is needed between secular caregivers, pastoral counselors, and members of the Christian community. Secular caregivers often underestimate the importance of the religious trauma associated with the sexual abuse trauma. Pastoral counselors are often inadequately prepared for the depth of anger, rage, and guilt in the adult who is attempting to resolve child sexual abuse trauma. Two books which, while

46. (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1972) 1:410-11; also in *ibid.*, 3:324-4-

29. *Ibid.*, 1:428.

30. In some forms of Protestantism, baptism is taken solely as a sign that the child will be brought up in the Christian community until such time as he or she will choose to become a Christian of her or his own free will. However, original sin and redemption go hand in hand and there is consistent theological justification for this type of thinking. See N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929 [1927]).

31. Phil Donahue television show on incest, September 1986; speaker is Roxanne Yesu. See also Forward, *Berayal*, 172.

32. The problem of child abuse (of which sexual abuse is just one part) revolves around the role of the child within the family and society. It is increasingly clear that the patriarchal family structure has allowed the systematic devaluation of women as human beings, and intervention into the sacred family sphere has been difficult even when the wife has been severely beaten; often the wife accepts the structure and thus, the responsibility for her situation. Letty Fogrebin (*Family Politics: Love and Power on an Intimate Frontier* [Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1983]) has shown how destructive this patriarchal myth is to children in American society. She presents a devastating picture of a society that has no place for its children and devalues their existence from birth. See Herman (*Father-Daughter*, 49-63) for a discussion of patriarchal justification for child sexual abuse. Children's rights are strongly advocated by John Holt in *Escape from Childhood*. Although Holt's picture is distinctly utopian, this book is a primer on the problems of childhood and the need for child rights.

33. Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

34. Donahue television show on incest, September 1986. The pain of the mother of five daughters who had been sexually abused by their father was accentuated by the fact that she was a member of a fundamentalist Christian sect which held strong patriarchal family values. She had raised her daughters to do as their father said, to respect and obey him. Only her second youngest daughter broke the silence.

35. The patriarchal god of Christianity was considered male almost exclusively until the recent advent of the feminist movement. While the criticisms of feminist interpreters of the idea of the male god have had an impact, there is still a large body of Christians who reject the notion of god as anything but male, as exemplified in the maleness of Jesus his son. The need for the destruction of the male patriarchal god of Christianity is passionately argued by E. Reynaud in *Holy Virility: The Social Construction of Masculinity*, trans. Ros Schwartz (London: Pluto Press, 1983 [1981]).

SHEILA A. REDMOND

not dealing with the specifics of child sexual abuse, may serve as a starting point for those who are counseling abuse victims and children of abuse in a Christian setting are Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence*; and Andrew Lester, *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985). The best way for any Christian caregiver to provide help is to absorb the findings on the sexual abuse of children, its long-term impact, and the specifics of treatment with the victims. If children can be well counseled during periods of trauma, and can discuss the ongoing problems that arise during the different periods of development, much of the long-term damage of sexual abuse may be mitigated. However, there remain fundamental questions that arise from problems of child sexual abuse, child abuse in general, and our attitudes toward children. Questions about authority, patriarchy, and human responsibility for evil must be seen with open eyes by theologians and church members. God may survive the questioning and the answers, but whether biblical and historical Christianity can survive in its present form is a question the future will answer.

6

*Theological Pornography:  
From Corporate to  
Communal Ethics\**

MARY E. HUNT

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) forces all Christians to rethink their sexual ethics. I do so as a Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic Church has been quick to issue statements but slow to provide any real insights into norms that will help all of us live responsibly and compassionately. The problem is compounded by the fact that people with AIDS are rarely invited to be a part of any theo-ethical conversation on the matter. I will try here to spell out the problem, namely, the archaic and privatized way in which most Christian ethical reflection takes place, and to hint at its solution.

The heart of the contemporary ethical dilemmas faced by the Christian community lies in the corporate mind-set that underlies our ethical behavior. We mirror in our moral reflection the worst heterosexist, patriarchal aspects of the corporate world. Then we wonder why our ethics do not work.

Until that mind-set is disassembled and reconstructed according to principles of inclusivity and mutuality and with a preferential option for those who are most deeply affected by its content, we will not be able to claim that the twentieth century was a time when Christian ethics flourished.

The stand churches take for or against homosexual behavior is important. But the deeper questions at hand are, Who is the "church" to decide these things, and, How do we do ethics from a feminist liberation Christian perspective?

Poor people, people of color, and those who are oppressed by the

*CHRISTIANITY  
PATRIARCHY  
and  
ABUSE*

*A Feminist Critique*

---

Edited by  
*Joanne Carlson Brown  
Carole R. Bohn*

The Pilgrim Press New York

Copyright © 1989 by The Pilgrim Press  
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise (brief quotations used in magazine or newspaper reviews excepted), without the prior permission of the publisher.

Biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission.

Royalties from the sale of this volume will be given to the Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1914 N. 34 St., Seattle, Washington 98103.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Christianity, patriarchy, and abuse : a feminist critique / edited by  
Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn.  
p. cm.

ISBN 0-8298-0808-6

1. Violence—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Patriarchy—  
Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Feminism—Religious aspects—  
Christianity. I. Brown, Joanne Carlson. II. Bohn, Carole R.

BT736.15.C465 1989

261.8'3—dc20

89-35505

The Pilgrim Press, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115