

**ONLY REAL MEN RESPECT WOMEN:
THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN PANDEMIC**

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Abstract

Violence against women is disturbing, and yet it remains endemic in all societies. The South African Government passed the Domestic Violence Act into law in 1998 (Act 116 of 1998) as part of the country's local and international commitment to protecting the rights of women. The Domestic Violence Act is, however, but one tool for combating gender-based violence. Although violence against women particularly affects women, it also affects society at large in many negative ways. Now it is up to us as a society to determine each member's role in the campaign to eradicate violence against women. The idea is that pastors, police, shelter workers, lawyers, therapists and counsellors should work together to prevent abuse. What is the role of the Church in preventing the abuse of women? What is the role of Scripture in this scenario? The main issue is: what drives men and women to strive for superior and subordinate roles and to be content with the situation? Could the answers to these questions be found in religion, our family structures or traditions? Culture shapes the roles of men and women in society - religion and traditions also play an important role. The Church has the responsibility to help believers understand their proper roles as men and women in marriage, and in society at large. We may not use Scripture to make women feel guilty for leaving an abusive relationship, nor to keep women in subordinate positions, or to encourage the view that men have power over

women. Sermons that condemn abuse, won't prevent it as long as we persist in proclaiming that patriarchy is prescribed by God, and that men are superior to women in relationships.

Keywords: Scripture, Bible, violence, women, abuse, power roles, patriarchy, marriage.

1. Introduction

Terry¹ says “Writing about violence against women is disturbing”. Reading about violence against women is just as disturbing for me. A huge poster in my local library depicting a man caressing a woman, recently caught my attention, not only because of what the picture illustrated, but also because of the caption: *Only real men respect women*.

This prompted the following questions to come to my mind: Firstly, what constitutes being a *real* man, and how is this notion defined by society? Secondly, what does it mean to *respect* a woman, bearing in mind that different cultures hold different ideas on what it means to “respect a woman”? Thirdly, is it really the responsibility of men to stop violence against women?

Violence against women is not something that is unusual or out of the ordinary, in fact it appears to be endemic in all societies², also in South Africa. Terry³ further states that domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women. “Domestic violence”, in which women are the victims, includes the following:

- Physical abuse of women by their partners, or the threat of physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse or the threat of sexual abuse;
- Intimidation;
- Harassment;
- Destruction of property.

According to Terry⁴ the following statistics provide a glimpse of the extent of domestic violence internationally:

- Surveys showed that between 10% and 50% of women report physical abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- One in every six women in Cambodia experienced domestic violence (research done in 1996).

¹ G. Terry, *Women's rights*. London, 2007, p. 121.

² Terry, *Women's rights*, p. 122.

³ Terry, *Women's rights*, p. 121.

⁴ Terry, *Women's rights*, p. 122.

- 60% of women interviewed in Nicaragua were the victims of physical, sexual or psychological violence (research done in 1995).
- 25% of men interviewed in Rio de Janeiro admitted that they had used physical violence at least once against an intimate female partner.
- 30% of Ugandan women interviewed had experienced threats or physical abuse from their current partners.

South African society is no different than the rest of the world. The South African Government passed the Domestic Violence Act into law in 1998 (Act 116 of 1998) as part of the country's local and international commitment to protecting the rights of women. Usdin, Christofides, Malepe & Maker⁵ indicate, however, that just over a year after the Act was passed into law and implemented in South Africa, it is still being reported that police officers continue to refuse to intervene in domestic violence cases. As a result, Usdin, Christofides, Malepe & Maker⁶ argue that the Domestic Violence Act is but one tool for combating gender-based violence. The on-going training of police, magistrates and prosecutors is also essential. Usdin, Christofides, Malepe & Maker suggest that school curricula should also address gender inequality and gender-related violence. It is clear that Usdin, Christofides, Malepe & Maker⁷ therefore feel that the problem of violence against women is the responsibility of different groups of people.

Violence against women is disturbing because it not only affects women, but also impacts negatively on society at large. According to Erasmus and Mans⁸, the trauma of abuse is life-long and affects a woman and her children physically, emotionally and psychologically. Terry⁹ notes that women who have been subjected to domestic violence are less productive because of the violence and consequently earn less money, which in turn leads to lower economic demand.

Another aspect is that abuse undermines women's ability to be agents of change in society, to promote social transformation in their own lives as well as in that of others. Violence against women is thus not only a violation of human rights, but also prevents women from contributing to the development of the country.

⁵ S. Usdin, N. Christofides, L. Malepe and A. Maker, The Value of Advocacy in Promoting Social change: Implementing the New Domestic Violence Act in South Africa, *Reproductive Health Matters* 8 (16) (2000), p. 60.

⁶ Usdin, Christofides, Malepe and Maker, Promoting Social change, p. 64.

⁷ Usdin, Christofides, Malepe and Maker, Promoting Social change, p. 64.

⁸ J.C. Erasmus & G.G. Mans, Churches as Service Providers for Victims of Sexual and/or Violent Crimes. A Case Study from the Paarl Community, *Acta Criminologica* 18(1) (2005), p.140.

⁹ Terry, *Women's rights*, pp.124-126.

Abused women lose control of their lives, which leads to depression, substance abuse, suicide, and a lowering of self-esteem¹⁰. Abuse can also result in serious health problems, including physical injuries, damage to reproductive organs, unwanted pregnancies, coerced abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility, miscarriage, premature labour, stillbirth and low birth weight¹¹.

In 2004 Amnesty International launched its “Stop Violence against Women” campaign and branded the issue a “human rights atrocity”. They suggested that governments, local authorities, religious leaders, and business and community leaders should be responsible for preventing this form of abuse¹². However, the question remains: did the campaign really change anything to improve the situation of battered women, or is it now up to us, as a society, to determine each person’s role in this campaign.

According to Erasmus and Mans¹³ the Church is the most influential non-governmental organisation in South Africa. Therefore churches must play a more substantial role as agents of service to battered women. Hood¹⁴ says churches need to do something about overcoming violence against women.

The idea is that pastors, police, shelter workers, lawyers, therapists and counsellors should work together on the problem of abuse¹⁵. Battered women need spiritual help and guidance. Nason-Clark and Clark Kroeger¹⁶ list the following as steps that should be taken by churches:

- Place information about local shelters or transition houses and how to contact them in women’s washrooms.
- Give sermons in which abuse is condemned.
- Hold discussions on battered women in women’s Bible study classes.
- Place brochures that deal with abuse in the church foyer.
- Establish support groups within the church.
- Carry out fundraising for local battered women’s shelters.
- Hold church-sponsored functions where a community leader speaks about abuse.
- Premarital counselling given by the pastor, should include the topic of violence.

¹⁰ D. Umberson, K. Anderson, J. Glick and A. Shapiro, Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60 (2) (May, 1998), p. 444.

¹¹ Usdin, Christofides, Malepe and Maker, Promoting Social change, p. 56.

¹² Terry, *Women’s rights*, p. 122 - Amnesty International Press Release, 5 March 2004.

¹³ Erasmus & Mans, Churches as Service Providers, p.141.

¹⁴ H. Hood, Speaking out and doing justice: It’s no longer a secret but what are the churches doing about overcoming violence against women? *Feminist Theology* 11(2) (2003), pp.216-225.

¹⁵ Nancy Nason-Clark & Catherine Clark Kroeger, *Refuge from abuse. Healing and Hope for Abused Christian women*. Downers Grove, Illinois, 2004, p. 62.

¹⁶ Nason-Clark & Clark Kroeger, *Refuge from abuse*, p. 66.

The above could contribute to the *healing* of battered women, however, it is interesting that Nason-Clark and Clark Kroeger¹⁷ single out “the women’s Bible study” as an important opportunity for discussions on battered women. What about the rest of the church? What is the role of the church in *preventing* the abuse of women? Both men and women need to be educated on this matter.

Brade’s research¹⁸ on domestic violence in African-American communities shows that religious communities and their leaders should be educated on the impact of psychological emotional, verbal, spiritual, sexual, financial, and physical abuse against individuals, families, groups and communities. Brade further states that the clergy need a holistically designed educational programme to heighten awareness of domestic violence in order to provide services to domestic violence perpetrators and survivors.

Fortune and Wood¹⁹ write that the “Centre for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence” (founded in Washington, and operating internationally) recognises the importance of spiritual values for each individual and affirms that organised religious communities of all faiths have an ethical responsibility to play a major role in bringing about an end to sexual and domestic violence within their own faith communities and the society at large.

However, before we can determine the way in which the Church can contribute to the campaign against violence against women, we need to understand how the sociological machine behind the issue of violence against women works.

2. The sociological roles of men and women in marriage

It is important to bear in mind that men and women play particular and different roles in society and in married life; that they adhere to certain values and norms of married life, and that they are influenced by society in their understanding of their particular roles. Pagelow²⁰ explains that parents are models of appropriate behaviour for their children, and that children imitate this behaviour. Children accept the norms and values of their families and will most probably stay within the traditional behaviour. In order to understand why modern men still demand the position of “head of household” and

¹⁷ Nason-Clark & Clark Kroeger, *Refuge from abuse*.

¹⁸ K.A. Brade, *Let the Church stop saying “Amen”. Domestic violence Perceptions and Experiences from a Cohort of African-American Clergy in Divinity School*. (PhD. Dissertation, Howard University Graduate School) Washington, D.C, 2009, pp. 127.

¹⁹ Marie M. Fortune & Frances Wood, The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence: A study in Applied Feminist Theology and Ethics, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4 (1) (Spring, 1988), p. 115.

²⁰ Mildred D. Pagelow, *Woman-battering. Victims and their experiences*. [Sage Library of Social Research volume 129] London, 1981, pp. 36-39.

dominate and control women and children in the home (and why many women appear to accept this) we need to understand the socio-historical foundations of the family²¹. Pagelow²² contends that the symptoms of inequality in society are symptoms of power long ago assumed, and since maintained, by men over women.

2.1 Traditions, norms and values

People are influenced by tradition. From childhood they are exposed to the behaviour of men and women that is typical and acceptable within their tradition. They learn these values and norms, and the rules for acceptable behaviour²³ as it is modelled to them or taught through religious doctrines.

According to Pagelow²⁴ victims of battering have a strong commitment to traditional values. Battered women often remain silent about their pain, for fear of being shamed in public. It is the shame of acknowledging that they have married the wrong person, often regarding themselves as the cause of the violence, and believing that they themselves have a weakness, which makes them deserving of the violence. These women would therefore rather blame themselves rather than blame tradition.

The specific roles and positions of men and women in a society, create power for certain role players in that society.

2.2 Role, positions and power

“Power” is the capacity of an individual to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner in which he or she desires, and to prevent his or her own conduct from being modified²⁵. According to Karp and Yoels²⁶ this “power” of an individual allows him or her to demonstrate insensitivity, callousness or indifference to the desires of others. Others must respond with sensitivity and accuracy to the wishes of the powerful. In this way the more powerful individual creates the roles that the less powerful must play.

Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro²⁷ state that domestic violence undermines feelings of personal control in victims. Violence thus forces women into specific roles of powerlessness and helplessness. What is interesting about Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro’s research is that the victims of violence learn that they cannot predict the outcome of their behaviour. Although they attempt to keep male partners calm in order to avoid conflicts that could escalate into violence, they are unable to predict

²¹ Pagelow, *Woman-battering*, p. 39.

²² Pagelow, *Woman-battering*, p. 39.

²³ D.A. Karp & W.C. Yoels, *Sociology in Everyday life*. Itasca, Illinois, 1993, p. 7.

²⁴ Pagelow, *Woman-battering*, p. 157.

²⁵ R.H. Tawney, *Equality*. London, 1931, p. 229.

²⁶ Karp & Yoels, *Sociology in Everyday life*, p. 175.

²⁷ Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro, *Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender*, p. 442.

whether their behaviour will soothe or enrage their male partners. These women thus suffer a reduced sense of control over their own personal safety²⁸.

These women are degraded, full of fear, objectified, socially and economically deprived and overwhelmed by responsibility as their perpetrators play power roles. The woman accepts the perception that she is valued less than others²⁹. When the perpetrator continuously forces her to perform sexual acts against her will or continuously calls her “stupid” or “ugly” or “incompetent”, her personal value diminishes.

Abused women also experience anxiety about their physical and emotional safety³⁰ which results in a sense of powerlessness. They have to wait for attacks to occur, and have no control over the situation.

Objectification occurs when the behaviour of abusers indicates to women that they are viewed as objects with no inner energy, resources, needs and desires³¹. The woman becomes the property of her abuser. He restricts her social contact, prescribes clothing, make-up and hairstyles. She acquires the feeling of being less than human.

When an abusive partner controls the behaviour of a woman, she can feel socially and economically deprived³². Economically, such a woman is not in control of the fulfilment of her basic needs. Socially she becomes isolated. Physically she is controlled by her abuser when she is unable to prevent attacks and locked up in her home³³. She feels overwhelmed by the amount of responsibility that she has been manipulated into accepting³⁴. These women get the blame for all the problems in their relationships.

They lose confidence in their perceptions of reality. Kirkwood is of the opinion that constant irreconcilability between what women perceive and what their partners maintain, eventually leads women to question the validity of their own subjective reality³⁵. What a loss of power! The woman is thus emotionally controlled by her abuser as she loses touch with her own needs, wants and perceptions.

The perpetrators on the other hand, abuse women in an effort to gain control over their environment. Smith³⁶ claims that a sense of control is

²⁸ Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro, *Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender*, pp. 443-444.

²⁹ Cathy Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners. From the scars of survival to the wisdom for change*. London, 1993, p. 46.

³⁰ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, p. 49.

³¹ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, pp. 50-51.

³² Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, p. 53.

³³ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, p. 63.

³⁴ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, p. 55.

³⁵ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, p. 56.

³⁶ M. Smith, Patriarchal ideology and wife beating: A Test of a feminist hypothesis, *Violence and Victims* 5 (1990), pp. 257-273.

central to the masculine identity. Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro³⁷ elaborate and state that these perpetrators are characterised by a reduced sense of personal control, which play a role in triggering the violent episodes. The typical social environment of these perpetrators is defined by such characteristics such as poverty, a lack of social resources (like supportive relationships and reliable child-care), and stress such as unemployment or work stress³⁸. These factors are perceived by the perpetrator as a threat or challenge to his control over his environment³⁹. The outcome of violence does not, however, enhance personal control for the perpetrator, as his attempt to increase his personal power through violence is ineffective⁴⁰.

The question is what is it about cultural traditions that influence men and women to strive for and accept these roles? Could the answer to this question be found in religion, our family structures, or traditions? Kirkwood⁴¹ remarks that the hierarchies of Western culture, which afford men greater resources in terms of money, cultural status, and the historical legacy of men's right to punish their wives, support men's abuse of women. This could be true of all cultures, and could suggest that culture shapes the roles of men and women in their society. Religion, too, played an important role in the patriarchal structure of the ancient world.

2.3 The patriarchal family

It is interesting to read that the most severe cases of domestic violence are called "patriarchal violence"⁴², a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands. Usdin, Christofides, Malepe & Maker⁴³ refer to it as a problem in the context of a strongly patriarchal society.

Smith⁴⁴ defines "patriarchy" as "*a structure in which men have more power and privilege than women, and an ideology that legitimises this arrangement*". The ideology of patriarchy has come a long way since ancient times, in which the family consisted of the entire household of husband, wife, children, other relatives and slaves⁴⁵. This family was the basic unit of society in Roman, Greek and Jewish cultures. The women in families were considered property and under the protection of the father. Once a girl

³⁷ Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro, *Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender*, p. 443.

³⁸ Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro, *Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender*, p. 443.

³⁹ Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro, *Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender*, p. 444.

⁴⁰ Umberson, Anderson, Glick & Shapiro, *Domestic Violence: Personal Control, and Gender*, p. 450.

⁴¹ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, p. 64.

⁴² M.P. Johnson, Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence: Two forms of Violence against Women, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57 (1995), p. 284.

⁴³ Usdin, Christofides, Malepe and Maker, *Promoting Social change*, p. 55.

⁴⁴ M. Smith, Patriarchal ideology and wife beating: A Test of a feminist hypothesis, *Violence and Victims* 5 (1990), p. 257.

⁴⁵ E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987, pp. 53-54.

married, she moved from her father's control to the control of her husband. Women were therefore, always subject to the power of a male relative.

Some authors distinguish between "social" and "familial" patriarchy. "Familial patriarchy" refers to male dominance in the family and not in society as a whole. Smith⁴⁶ agrees with feminists who suggest that husbands who adhere to an ideology of familial patriarchy are more likely to beat their wives. The other striking finding of Smith's study is that husbands with low incomes, low education and low-status jobs are significantly more likely to advocate such an ideology. Economic stress makes it difficult for these men to maintain the degree of dominance over their wives that they believe they are entitled to, with violence then becoming a means of establishing or re-establishing control.

An abusive partner uses his own powers of persuasion, physical strength, awareness of the vulnerabilities of a woman and many more personal resources to impose control. If he has access to external resources, such as management of the family income, he can use this to enact further control. Power structures, on the other hand, afford these male abusers more resources with which they can enforce their control⁴⁷.

This patriarchal ideology becomes an energy source of patriarchal domination. For most feminists violence against women is only possible in a context that defines women as subordinate to men⁴⁸. The more patriarchal the norms are, the higher the level of wife beating⁴⁹. Beechey⁵⁰ maintains that it is important not only to identify patriarchy but also to explain why patriarchal relations exist and persist throughout history in all societies. Is it because of the biological differences between men and women? Rather, I agree with scholars⁵¹ that an ideology such as patriarchy is culturally transmitted through the centuries, and has been transferred through generations via social institutions such as mythology, law, history, textbooks and other literature, religion, psychotherapy, and the media. Pagelow says that gender role socialisation, which defines women as perpetual children and the property of men, had its basis in the earliest civilisations.

Modern women are thus still disempowered by an ancient social system, namely patriarchy⁵². We are therefore left with the practice and philosophical defence of male domination⁵³.

⁴⁶ Smith, Patriarchal ideology and wife beating, pp. 257,261.

⁴⁷ Kirkwood, *Leaving abusive partners*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁸ Smith, Patriarchal ideology and wife beating, p. 258.

⁴⁹ Smith, Patriarchal ideology and wife beating, p. 260.

⁵⁰ Veronica Beechey, On patriarchy, *Feminist Review* 3 (1979), p. 68.

⁵¹ Scholars such as Pagelow, *Woman-battering*, p. 40.

⁵² Elma M. Cornelius, Patriarchy and the NT, *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 13 (2002), p. 48 – Elma M. Cornelius, Androcentric Language in 1 Thessalonians, *In die Skriflig* 34(3) (2000), pp. 373-382.

But let us now also consider the role religion plays in perpetuating the abuse of women.

2.4 The role of religion

As stated before, religion is but one means of transmitting culture from one generation to the other. Men and women in marriages will perform the roles they were taught in their families, roles which are acceptable to their culture. Fitzgerald⁵⁴ argues that religion has the power both to subvert and to sustain society, and Christianity is a prime example of religion's capacity to manifest itself in both revolutionary and reactionary ways. It supports some aspects of a given culture and transforms other. For many "Christianity" is often understood as the defender of family values and of traditional forms of social life⁵⁵.

Is abuse an issue that is a result of men misinterpreting the message of their religion? We hear about worldwide campaigns against domestic violence. The "White Ribbon Campaign" started in Canada in 1991 and became an international campaign. The aim was to raise awareness among men and to mobilise them to work for change in their environments. Men are thus encouraged to take responsibility for ending violence against women, instead of blaming them⁵⁶. This is more or less the same point of departure depicted in the poster of the local library. Men are given the responsibility to act as real men: "Only real men respect women". The "We Can Campaign" across South Asia had a different angle with its strapline "Equal relationships are violence free"⁵⁷. In Sri Lanka the strapline is "Violence destroys the whole family"⁵⁸, indicating a focus on the dangers of domestic violence for every member of the family unit.

The "Centre for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence"⁵⁹ aims to use education and training to mobilise religious communities to respond to the needs of victims, offenders and families, and to prevent violence. They believe that exposure to religious doctrine and practice means that many people will encounter crises of faith as they face victimisation⁶⁰. The Centre therefore became a national resource for training and educating religious communities. Training is indeed necessary, not only to help battered women

⁵³ J. Peradotto, & J.P. Sullivan, (eds), *Women in the Ancient World*. Albany, 1982, p. 2.

⁵⁴ J.T. Fitzgerald, Early Christian Missionary Practice and Pagan Reaction. 1 Peter and domestic violence against slaves and wives, in M.W. Hamilton, T.H. Olbricht & J. Peterson (eds), *Renewing tradition. Studies in Texts and Contexts* (pp. in honor of James W. Thompson). [Princeton Theological Monograph Series 65] Eugene, Ore, 2007, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Fitzgerald, Early Christian Missionary Practice and Pagan Reaction, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Terry, *Women's rights*, pp. 128-129.

⁵⁷ Terry, *Women's rights*, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Terry, *Women's rights*, p. 135.

⁵⁹ Fortune & Wood, The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, pp. 115-116.

⁶⁰ Fortune & Wood, The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, p. 117.

to heal, but to prevent abuse from happening at all. In addition, the training is necessary for men, but also for the whole of society. This is necessary since it is the responsibility of the Church to help believers, both men and women, understand their roles in marriage. We should not use Scripture to make women feel guilty about leaving an abusive relationship, nor to allow men to think they are entitled to have power over women and keeping them in subordinate positions.

Karp and Yoels⁶¹ explain how the powerful create the roles that the less powerful must play. Religion plays a very dangerous part in creating roles for the powerful and the less powerful. The concern here is that the Bible may be used in Christian societies to justify the prescribed roles for men and women. Where do we get a clearer glimpse of a patriarchal world than from the Bible?

2.5 The role of Scripture

Sermons that condemn abuse won't prevent it as long as we persist in proclaiming that patriarchy is prescribed by God, and that men are the superiors of women in marriage. Have you ever heard a sermon in which you were warned not to see the patriarchal world as God's norm? Have you ever heard a pastor explaining to his or her congregation that patriarchy was the social structure of the ancient world in which the Bible originated? Is it explained why Jesus did not respond within the parameters of patriarchy to women? Most probably not, and we would rather hear about the following: women are men's helpers, women are the weaker ones, wives are their husbands' subordinates, and women should be obedient to their husbands.

What does Scripture tell us about women? We should keep in mind, however, that the Bible was written exclusively by men and that the voices of women from the ancient world are not heard in the Bible. We have to be satisfied with the picture of these women presented through the eyes of men. Therefore, many believe that the Bible is the problem in this regard. Procter-Smith⁶² believes that the Bible needs to be changed. The Bible is an authoritative Word that might be used to justify the subordination of women. In the following section the focus will be on what Scripture has to offer battered women.

2.5.1 Suffering

Battered women experience suffering on different levels: emotionally, socially, financially, physically and spiritually. What can Scripture offer these women to help them through their sufferings? The Bible explains that suffering should be expected (2 Timothy 3:12), that Christians should be

⁶¹ Karp & Yoels, *Sociology in Everyday life*, p. 175.

⁶² M. Procter-Smith, "Reorganising victimisation": The intersection between liturgy and domestic violence, in C.J. Adams & M.M. Fortune (eds.), *Violence against women and children. A Christian theological sourcebook*. New York, 1995, p. 340.

patient (2 Timothy 2:3 and 2 Timothy, 4:5, Romans 12:12), that they should persevere (Romans 5:3) and rejoice (Colossians 1:24, James 1:2-3, 1 Peter 4:12-19), not be disheartened (Ephesians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 3:3) or complain (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). 1 Peter 2:20-21 expresses this as follows: *“If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval ... you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you ... so that you would follow in his steps”*.

The Bible provides many examples of people who suffered. Joseph was humiliated (Genesis 39:1-20), the Israelites in Egypt suffered in many ways (Exodus 1:8-22), the poor suffered economically (Nehemia 5:1-5, Amos 2:6-7), Job was emotionally and financially destroyed (Job 2:1-13), Daniel’s friends were thrown into a furnace of blazing fire (Daniel 3:13-23), David had his own ordeal (1 Samuel 26:18-20), and Paul did not hesitate to share his own sufferings (Acts 14:19; 2 Corinthians 11:23-29). Throughout the Bible Christians are portrayed as people who very often suffered injustices (Hebrews 10:32-34, 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15, 1 Peter 2:19-21, 1 Peter 4:12-16).

The Bible consoles its readers by promising that:

- God shares in our suffering (John 11:35-36);
- God is in control (Job 1:6-12; Romans 8:38-39);
- God won’t leave us (Isaiah 43:2); and
- Good will come out of it (Romans 8:28).

It is stated that God allows suffering for different reasons:

- To punish (2 Samuel 12:9-18, 2 Kings 21:10-16, 2 Chronicles 33:10-11);
- To test (Deuteronomy 8:2, Job 2:1-6, Isaiah 48:10, 1 Peter 1:6-7);
- To teach (Psalm 119:71,75, Romans 5:3, James 1:3);
- To keep one humble (Deuteronomy 8:3, 2 Chronicles 7:13-14);
- To teach one to trust (2 Corinthians 12:7-10);
- To convert people (Judges 6:1-6, Psalm 107:4-6, 10-13, Hosea 5:15);
- To purify people (Zechariah 13:7-9, Malachi 3:2-3, John 15:2);
- To promote the Gospel (Acts 8:3-4, 2 Timothy 4:16-17) and
- For God’s glory (John 9:1-3).

All the above may persuade a Christian woman in a violent relationship not to feel isolated, but may force her to accept the suffering as a follower of Christ. One can imagine the struggle in such a woman’s mind to determine God’s reason for allowing her suffering.

2.5.2 Women in general

In the Old Testament we read that in the beginning the woman was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). It is also refreshing to read that men and women were created with equal responsibilities and blessings (Genesis 1:26-30), as the equal of man to help him (Genesis 2:18, 20). These are quite significant statements about women, yet, we hardly ever hear sermons about this aspect of the role of women. The problem arises when we read Genesis 3:16 about how the woman sinned and was subordinated to her husband: "...he shall rule over you". She is also described as the weaker one (Isaiah 19:16; Jeremiah 50:37; 1 Peter 3:7). Leviticus 27:1-8 specifically describes her as having less worth than a man. Numbers 36:1-9 and Psalm 127:3-5 mention that daughters are less important than sons. There is thus sufficient reference in the Old Testament to force women into subordinate roles. If pastors preached only from the Old Testament, it would paralyse women in our churches emotionally and socially, and create more and more power for men. It is therefore important always to show the changes that were brought about by the coming of Jesus – also for women (see paragraph 2.5.4).

2.5.3 Marriage and divorce

The Bible is clear on the issue of divorce – it is a negative force in any society as it introduces disruption, anger, pain, and loss on different levels. Malachi 2:16 says God hates divorce, and it is made clear that divorce was not part of God's plan (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:8). The New Testament is clear that marriage is a lifelong commitment (read Matthew 19:3-6,9; Mark 10:1-12; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39) and is regarded as binding (Matthew 19:3-6; Romans 7:1-3).

In ancient Greece and Rome divorce was easy and required little formality⁶³. A simple oral or written notice was sufficient, by one or both parties. Women as well as men could terminate a marriage. In Jewish law, however, the right of divorce belonged to the husband only. The law did not allow the woman to prosecute her husband for his infidelities⁶⁴. This is the situation we find in the Bible. Divorce, according to the Bible, is only possible if the husband finds something objectionable about his wife (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), such as infidelity (Matthew 5:31-33; 19:1-12), or hardness of heart (Mark 10:1-12). Paul also allowed divorce in the case of marriages between believers and non-believers if the non-believing partner filed for divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). It is thus understandable that a Christian woman might be forced by doctrine to stay with her abusive husband.

⁶³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of early Christianity*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of early Christianity*, p. 57.

2.5.4 Wives and husbands

The New Testament provides a somewhat different view about men and women in marriages. Both parties have equal responsibilities that are discussed in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; 32-35; and Ephesians 5:21. Both wives and husbands should grant each other their conjugal rights, they have authority over each other's bodies in a love relationship, and they should be subject to one another. This is, however, where the equality stops. We find expanded discussions of the different responsibilities of husbands with regard to their wives (Ephesians 5:25-32; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7) and of wives with regard to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1). Women are urged to accept the authority of their husbands and be subject to them; husbands to show consideration for their wives, to love them and never to treat them harshly.

In 1992 John Piper and Wayne Grudem were asked: "*Don't you think that stressing headship and submission gives impetus to the epidemic of wife abuse?*"⁶⁵ They refuted this and stressed that their focus was rather on "sacrificial" headship and "thoughtful" submission. The fact is that a distinction is made between headship and submission. It creates a gap between men and women, and gives them different roles, different powers, and different status. Piper and Grudem⁶⁶ blame the occurrence of domestic violence on the confusion and frustrations of sexual identity. They acknowledge the role of Christians to teach in the home and in the church on how true manhood and womanhood express themselves in the loving and complementary roles of marriage.

In his article, Fitzgerald⁶⁷ admits that domestic violence committed against slaves and wives was common in the ancient patriarchal worlds. In referring to 1 Peter 3:1-6 Fitzgerald⁶⁸ notes that in this Scripture Christian wives who were victims of domestic violence, were encouraged not to give in to fear and intimidation, no matter what harm they might suffer from their husbands. These women are told by the author of 1 Peter to be submissive (1 Peter 2:18; 3:1). Fitzgerald says that the author of 1 Peter hopes that the behaviour of the wife will lead to the conversion of her pagan husband (1 Peter 3:1-2), and argues that this Scripture offers wives a strategy for avoiding domestic violence⁶⁹. He says that the author knew that those women would

⁶⁵ See J. Piper & W. Grudem, *Fifty Crucial Questions. An overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood.* Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Adapted from a CBMW-sponsored book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.* Wheaton, IL, 1992, p. 17.

⁶⁶ Piper & Grudem, *Fifty Crucial Questions*, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Fitzgerald, *Early Christian Missionary Practice and Pagan Reaction*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, *Early Christian Missionary Practice and Pagan Reaction*, p. 30.

⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, *Early Christian Missionary Practice and Pagan Reaction*, p. 31.

suffer domestic violence for their faith in Christ, and to them he offered the example of Christ himself (1 Peter 2:21-24) and the assurance that it was both a blessing and a privilege to share in Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). This makes it easy to understand why women may choose to remain silent about domestic violence.

We find two main streams of thinking regarding women's roles in the New Testament. The authors of the New Testament, being part of a patriarchal world, consistently urge women to remain silent and to be subordinate. Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrated in his actions the other side of the coin.

2.5.5 Jesus and women

Jesus came to the world to show among other things, that despite the patriarchal tenets of the ancient world, women and men are equal. He made it clear that the patriarchal system as it existed was not necessary for order in society. During His sojourn on earth He treated women with respect. Jesus is never pictured as ordering women about, ignoring them in public, and treating them as weak and inferior. We are told that Jesus healed both men and women (Matthew 8:14-15, Matthew 9:18-26, Mark 1:30-31, Mark 5:21-43, Luke 4:38-39, Luke 8:40-56, Luke 13:10-17). Through Jesus' teachings a distinction was no longer made in terms of the equality of men and women (Luke 1:41-45, Acts 2:1-4, Acts 9:36-42, Acts 17:4 and 12). Galatians 3:28 is the key verse: "...*there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus...*"

Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in spite of society's prescriptions and expectations. (John 4:1-46). In this story Jesus made a deliberate choice to cross ethnic and religious and gender boundaries⁷⁰. Socio-historically the Samaritans and the Jews were divided by history and religion⁷¹. In the time of the New Testament the Jews considered the Samaritans as foreigners⁷², however, for Jesus the history of the two nations is of no importance, as demonstrated when He speaks to a Samaritan.

Scripture also tells that the disciples were astonished that He should speak to a woman (John 4:27). Coggins⁷³ relates how Samaritan women were regarded as ritually impure, as lifelong menstruants. Although Jewish women were not as restricted in public as Greek women⁷⁴, women in general were not allowed to speak to men in public. However, Jesus asks this woman for water.

⁷⁰ Elma M. Cornelius, I heard the voice of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-46, *NGTT* 49 (3+4) (September-December 2008), pp. 69-87.

⁷¹ R.J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews. The origins of Samaritanism reconsidered*. Oxford, 1975, p. 138.

⁷² Read Ferguson, *Backgrounds of early Christianity*, p. 423.

⁷³ Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews*, p. 157.

⁷⁴ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of early Christianity*, p. 58.

He chooses not to abide by the prescriptions of the patriarchal culture. Can we therefore accept that Jesus was not advocating patriarchy but rather order in society when He ordered wives to be subject to their husbands? Perhaps 1 Corinthians 7:35 helps us to understand when the author says: “*I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord*”.

If we as members of the Church, fail to proclaim the change that came to society through Jesus, we fail to preach the New Testament: we fail at being Christians. One gets the impression that the roles assigned to men and women is all about creating order in society and that order can only be maintained by having order within family life. In this way the order in the family also affects society at large. Order in society, however, does not necessarily imply patriarchy.

2.5.6 Conclusions

The Bible is a powerful and authoritative book used by Christians to guide the conduct of believers and to give authority to Christian values and norms. This book originated in an ancient patriarchal world and therefore the typical “prescribed” behaviour for men and women in society and in marriage is patriarchal. When the Church uses Scripture to teach Christians appropriate behaviour, there is enough in the Bible to socialise men into roles of power and women into subordinate roles. Unfortunately, this gives rise to domestic violence and the abuse of women. To offer patriarchy as an imperative to people will not help battered women in any way.

The New Testament, however, does offer a life-saving message for battered women – there was no reason in ancient society for Jesus to treat women as less valued. Scripture thus offers enough to maintain the ideology of men’s power over women, but also offers a redeeming message through the life of Jesus. It will thus all depend on the way in which the Church applies the teachings of the Bible in society. The problem does not seem to be the Bible as such, but rather what we preach from the Bible according to our interpretation of Scripture.

3. The role of the church

In Blyth’s article entitled, *Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence*⁷⁵, the voicelessness of the rape victim Dinah (as described in Genesis 34) is discussed. In this text Dinah becomes voiceless as others tell her story. Blyth attempts to redress the patriarchal imbalance in the text in order to break the silence of Dinah. Blyth refuses to passively accept the value statements of the

⁷⁵ Caroline Blyth, *Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence: A Feminist Re-Reading of Dinah’s Voicelessness in Genesis 34*, *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009), pp. 483-506.

text in passivity but approaches the text with a hermeneutics of suspicion⁷⁶. The problem is that the average member of a church community is not in a position to engage in a dialogue with the Bible, taking such a critical stance. It is the responsibility of the Church to open up for discussion issues such as these for members of the congregation.

Brade⁷⁷ suggests that theological study may require a few changes in ethics, research, systematic theology, preaching, prophetic ministry and pastoral care.

De Klerk⁷⁸ gives possible liturgical solutions to the phenomenon of violence. He argues that the current liturgy of the Reformed tradition gives enough opportunity for traumatised people to be comforted⁷⁹. It should be made clear that God suffers with us and that suffering assists in the process of growing in our faith. The worship service should give these sufferers a sense of security, as they are in the presence of God and other believers⁸⁰.

This however does not address the question of how much the Church has contributed to the problem of domestic violence over the years by shaping people's understanding of their roles in society, by validating men's power over women, and in doing so contributing to violence against women in our societies. Society needs to be educated on the following:

- The origin of the patriarchal ideology;
- The place of the patriarchal system in the Bible;
- The authoritativeness of the ideology of patriarchy; and
- God's values and norms for men and women.

The Church needs to promote social change in order to protect women from being abused. The Church brings God's Word to the world, explains Scripture, and authorizes values and norms. It has an enormous responsibility and an important role to play in the complete process of socialising people. Religious communities are not permitted to provoke domestic violence and the battering of women!

⁷⁶ See E. Fuchs, Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible for Women: The Neoliberal turn in Contemporary Feminist Scholarship, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24 (2) (2008), pp. 45-65 for an analysis and critique of different attempts to "reclaim the Hebrew Bible for women".

⁷⁷ K.A. Brade, *Let the Church stop saying "Amen". Domestic violence Perceptions and Experiences from a Cohort of African-American Clergy in Divinity School*. (PhD. Dissertation, Howard University Graduate School) Washington, D.C., 2009, p. 132.

⁷⁸ B.J. De Klerk, Liturgiese antwoorde op geweld – 'n Verkenning, *In die Skriflig* 38(1) (2004), pp. 145-166.

⁷⁹ De Klerk, Liturgiese antwoorde op geweld, p. 163.

⁸⁰ De Klerk, Liturgiese antwoorde op geweld, pp. 157, 159.

4. Conclusion

The caption to the poster in our local library reads: “Only real men will respect women”. I believe that, in accordance with Fitzgerald’s understanding of 1 Peter, the author of 1 Peter would have said: “*Only real Christian women will submit to domestic violence for their faith in Christ*”. Imagine the influence of such a statement on battered women and their abusers. The women would be forced to simply accept their fate as the men in their lives would be encouraged to play their power roles in women’s faith journeys.

The “We Can Campaign” across South Asia⁸¹ came up with a better strapline: “Equal relationships are violence free”. Only when we can get people to accept the notion of equal relationships, will we be successful in ending domestic violence. The problem is that people must first be persuaded of this equality, which can only be done by socialising them into a new understanding of relationships in society and marriage. We first need to educate people.

Making society aware of the dangers of an ancient social system is the responsibility of the Church - all men and women. Perhaps our slogan in the fight against violence against women should be: “Let us not allow an ancient ideology to leave our women battered!”

⁸¹ Terry, *Women’s rights*, p. 134.