

## *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword*

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This article examined hypothesized relations between Judeo-Christian religion and intimate partner violence. Given their complex and controversial nature, the following two questions were explored: (1) whether batterers selectively misinterpret scripture to justify or rationalize violence toward women, and (2) whether certain religious tenets around faith, the nature of marriage, the role of women and men, obedience, forgiveness, and salvation constrict and inevitably bind women to abusive relationships? An integrative literature review was employed to draw inferences among male patriarchy, religious scripture, and intimate partner violence. Overall, the findings are twofold: (1) elements of male patriarchy are included in much of Judeo-Christian scripture, and (2) some abusers rely on literal interpretations of select scripture to rationalize and defend violence toward their partners. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms that advocate and promote mutual submission in marriage.

The dark clouds of intimate partner violence (IPV, hereafter) are so widespread that they threaten the landscape of nearly all cultures, age groups, and social classes. Transcending gender, race/ethnicity, and religion, IPV remains one of the principal causes of female injury in almost every country in the world (Catalano, 2012; Hajjar, 2004; King, 2009; Scott, 2009; Thomas & Beasley, 1993). In Morocco, for example, IPV is so pervasive that the most common reason women seek to end a marriage is to extricate themselves from situations of domestic violence (King, 2009). Promoted by certain attitudes that espouse male dominance, IPV stands as a global phenomenon affecting scores of women daily. While acknowledging its global reach across cultures and religions, the scope and context of this article is confined to Western societies with a specific focus on Judeo-Christian religion within the United States. Beyond matters of convenience, Judeo-Christianity was chosen because, at 78.4%, it is the leading religious affiliation within the United States. Sometimes written as Judaeo-Christian, it is commonly used to describe a body of concepts and values thought to be held in common by Judaism and Christianity.

This article explores relations between Judeo-Christian religion and IPV, which is defined as abuse that occurs between two people in an intimate relationship (including spouses, former spouses, and partners). Existing along a continuum, IPV ranges from a single episode of violence to ongoing battering, including threats as well as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and even spiritual abuse (Centers for Disease Control, 2006). As women attempt to escape abusive relationships, there are realistic concerns that

pastors and members of some religious communities might undermine their efforts by encouraging continued patience and faith as a way to overcome the abuse.<sup>1</sup> Given their complex and controversial nature, the present study explores the following two questions: (1) do abusers selectively misinterpret scripture to justify or rationalize their violence, and (2) do certain religious tenets regarding faith, the nature of marriage, the role of women and men, obedience, forgiveness, and salvation constrict and inevitably bind women to abusive relationships? This article uses an integrative literature review to draw inferences between male patriarchy, Christian scripture, and IPV. In the process, it explores the origins of the bible, the role of male patriarchy, and the misuse of scripture to sustain violence in intimate relationships. In hopes of informing social practice, it encourages practitioners to explore how their client's particular spirituality and religious beliefs might affect their attitude toward the use of violence in relationships. Overall, it seeks to promote a more constructive dialogue among religious leaders and parishioners to help stem the rising tide of IPV.

### *Extent of the Problem*

Data from both secular and Christian studies suggest that on any given Sunday a significant percentage of women sitting in church pews are victims of domestic violence (Castle, 2002; Potter, 2007). Studies have confirmed that church parishioners are indeed victims of domestic violence and related abuses, including verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and spiritual abuse, but some religious communities have tended to minimize or deny that IPV and brutality are

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<sup>1</sup> Possible scriptural justification for such patience and faith can be found throughout the bible. For example, the book of Mark (10:9 NIV) states that "What God has joined together, let no man separate." A similar version is expressed in the book of Matthew (19:6 KJV).

prevalent within their congregations (Brinkerhoff, Grandin & Lupri, 1992; Potter, 2007; Scanzioni, 1988).

While both women and men perpetrate—and are victimized—by IPV,<sup>2</sup> most researchers and practitioners find women are far more likely to be victims of domestic violence than men. Women also sustain greater degrees of injury and are victimized by more severe forms of violence than men (Websdale, 1998). Among married couples, rates of IPV are considerably lower in comparison to non-married couples (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). Nonetheless, it is estimated that nearly 30% of all U.S. couples (whether married or not) will experience IPV at some point in their relationship. Within this population it is estimated that anywhere between 3% and 10% will experience severe forms of violence at the hands of an intimate partner (Straus & Gelles, 1990). In fact, Berry (1995) suggests that intimate partners were responsible for 30–50% of all women murdered.

In an effort to escape abusive relationships, women rely on a variety of social networks, including family and friends, battered women's shelters, domestic violence hotlines, social services, and justice systems. Some victims turn to religion and religious institutions in search of refuge, social support, and spiritual guidance to alleviate pain and suffering. The process of seeking spiritual support reveals an array of trials, tribulations, and circumstances that are unique to religious settings and worthy of further exploration. When men and women enter into intimate unions in a Christian context they are often subscribing to a whole set of religious tenets and beliefs around the nature of heterosexual relations, childbearing, child-rearing, and obedience to authority (see Knickmeyer, Levitt, Horne, & Bayer, 2003). Yet, subscribing to these expectations, while being battered, invites confusion and makes it difficult to withdraw from an abusive relationship. Further compounding matters is the uncertainty regarding the role of religion in assisting (or possibly hindering) women who are trapped in abusive relationships.

### *Historical Context*

For much of American history, the institutions of marriage and religion have been closely related (Christiano, 2000). To this day, religious attendance and beliefs are positively correlated with a host of variables, marital status, childbearing, marital quality, and marital stability in the U.S. as a whole (Call & Heaton, 1997). However, connections between religious practices and IPV are not as clear-cut, yielding conflicting results. For example, Ellison and Anderson (2002) analyzed data from the National Survey of Families and Households and found that those who attended services more often reported less spousal abuse. In looking at denominational differences in spouse abuse, Brinkerhoff, et al (1992) found no association between church attendance and spousal violence. Others suggest that certain religious ideologies (e.g., variants of conservative Protestantism) may legitimize, or at least fail to adequately condemn, the practice of partner violence (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Scanzioni, 1988). Still others proclaim that the strength of pro-family rhetoric and ideology in these quarters may blind clergy and others to

the magnitude of this problem within churches, and could restrict the options of women once they are abused (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Nason-Clark 1997). Furthermore, some evidence suggest that discrepancies in a partner's religious beliefs and congregational beliefs may lead to an increased risk of violence particularly among men holding more conservative beliefs about disobedient wives and authority of the Bible (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Gelles 1974). Moreover, Pevey et al (1996) have found that many Baptist churches use predominantly male images of God, preach the doctrine of wifely submission, and exclude women from leadership roles. As these images convey notions of male superiority and authority, coupled with an expectation of female obedience and submission, it is important to understand and appreciate the rather nuanced—yet inseparable—relationship between religious scripture, male patriarchy, and IPV.

Historically, physical discipline in the context of a marriage was not recognized as violence at all. Instead, it was regarded simply as one of the religious duties of the husband (see Hart, 1992). For instance, if threats of approbation against a wife did not work, men were encouraged to "...pick up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and destroy the body" (Hart, 1992, p. 3). Through time and evolving societal standards, the state has intervened with domestic violence specific statutes and related sanctions to punish and deter IPV. Still, some question the propriety of state intervention in marital affairs. Andrew Klein, the former chief probation officer of a model domestic violence court, stated that he has heard batterers defy his state's domestic violence laws claiming that "restraining orders are against God's will because the bible says a man should control his wife" (see Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003:59).

### *Methodology: Integrative Literature Review*

Recent examinations into the relationship between religion and IPV have increased the need for and the production of all types of reviews of the literature (including integrative, systematic, qualitative, and meta-analyses). The present study uses an integrative review method because these typically include diverse methodologies (for example, experimental and non-experimental research) capable of exploring relations between religion and domestic violence. An integrative literature review also allows researchers to evaluate the strength of scientific evidence while identifying gaps in past and current research. According to Whittemore and Knafl (2005), "Well-done integrative reviews present the state of the science, contribute to theory development, and have direct applicability to practice and policy" (p. 546). In the process, it identifies the need for future research, central issues in an area, and whether theoretical or conceptual

<sup>2</sup> While intimate partner violence and domestic violence are overlapping yet distinct constructs, for purposes of this article, these are used interchangeably. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the realities of male victimization and physical child abuse are also acknowledged, nonetheless.

frameworks are utilized (Cooper, 1998).

In the present study the accessible population included both electronic and library resources. The criteria for inclusion were publications between 1980 and 2012. The majority of the research resulted from on-line computer searches utilizing the following data bases: Criminal Justice Abstracts, JSTOR, Religious Studies, and The Association of Religious Data Archives. Advanced searches were conducted using the following terms: domestic violence, family violence, religion, Christianity, and United States. Developing a clear and concise system for data collection greatly improves the reviewer's capacity to ascertain reliable information from all information sources (Cooper, 1998). Inter-rater reliability of selected literature was verified by the author and re-analyzed by a graduate research assistant. From this integrative review, three themes emerged: male patriarchy, proof-texting, and matters of faith. These themes are fully illustrated and described in the paragraphs below. In the process, we explore the origins of the Christian Bible, examine its patriarchal nature, and identify human propensities to take scripture out of context to one's purpose.

### Biblical Origins, Patriarchal Passages, and Proof-Texting

Scholars agree that early Israel was an oral society of pastoralism and subsistence farming (Schneidwind, & Rendsburg, 2010; van der Toorn, 2007; Schniedewind, 2004). As such, some have questioned how and why such a pastoral-agrarian society came to write and give authority to the written word? William Schniedewind (2004), went a step further by asking: why did the bible become a book at all. This question recognizes that the first biblical accounts were conveyed only orally, given a lack of writing and literacy skills. Naturally, in order to have a sacred text, a culture must first have writing. For that text to be the central authority of a religion, literacy must be widespread. To that end, the invention of alphabetic writing (circa, 3150 BC) was pivotal a development in the history of writing, and when the Bible became a book, the written word supplanted the living voice of the teacher (Schniedewind, 2004).

The translation of the Bible from its original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), is a complex story that is beyond the scope of this article. However, prior to the King James translation, earlier versions and translations included Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, and Latin Vulgate. Christian translations, on the other hand, culminated with the works of William Tyndale (in 1506), William Coverdale (in 1535), and John Calvin (in 1560). The King James version (circa, 1611) replaced both the *Bishop's Bible* and the *Geneva Bible* as the English translation. The purpose of this new translation was to have a Bible that could be read in church services and at home. When examining the issue of family violence, it is interesting to note that both the old and new testaments of the Christian Bible contain many patriarchal passages that pay homage to man's dominion over women and children. These passages and the degree to which they can be exploited and misinterpreted are explored fully in the following para-

graphs.

### *Patriarchal Passages*

Besides Christianity, all world religions appear connected by the seeds and common threads of male patriarchy: a hypothetical social system based upon the absolute authority of the father or an elderly male over the family group (Bartkowski, 1997). The concept is often used, by extension (in anthropology and feminism, for example), to refer to the expectation that men take primary responsibility for the welfare of the community as a whole, acting as representatives of a male God via public office. According to Buzawa and Buzawa (2003), Christianity, Judaism, and other patriarchal religions simply affirmed male-dominated family structures that were already in existence. From the earliest record, "most societies gave the patriarch of the family the right to use force against women and children under his control" (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003, p. 57). Roman law, for instance, gave legal guardianship of a wife to her husband. This concept, *patria potestas*, included the largely unfettered ability of the husband to legally beat his wife, who became, in legal effect, his "daughter" (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003). By extension, patriarchal beliefs reserved leadership roles to males—while limiting female involvement in rituals—in the belief that women were less connected to God (see Levitt & Ware, 2006). Earlier research by Jeffords (1984) suggests that beliefs regarding sex/role expectations within society contribute to a patriarchal system that assigns women a subordinate role to men. This is especially evident within religious circles as men assume primary leadership roles within nearly all facets of organized religion. In the Catholic Church, for instance, the idea of women seeking ordination and positions of authority is generally discouraged.

Many seminal texts, including the Torah, the Bible, and the Koran all contain passages that, if literally read, seem to subordinate women, or emphasize family solidarity and preservation to the exclusion of concerns over the physical safety of the wife (see Buzawa, Buzawa, & Stark, 2011). In the case of Christianity, much of the rationale for suggesting a relationship between religiosity and IPV is predicated on the assumption that members of the more fundamentalist groups tend to be more patriarchal. After all, strong patriarchal beliefs are "founded on the conviction that in the beginning Eve was created from Adam's rib in order to serve him" (Scanzoni, 1988, p. 136). Consequently, and in close alignment with feminist interpretations, patriarchy tends to influence the reading of scripture. Moreover, "male and female biblical scholars alike tend to 'read as men,' having internalized the norms of androcentric scholarship in which the male focus and patriarchal worldview of the biblical text is paralleled in the practice and history of biblical exegesis" (Reinhartz, 2000, p. 44). Regarded by some as patriarchal, misogynistic, and biased in its interpretation, Schussler's (1985) views on the male reading of scripture is expressed accordingly:

Not only is scripture interpreted by a long line of men and proclaimed in patriarchal churches,

it is also authored by men, written in androcentric language, reflective of religious male experience, selected and transmitted by male religious leadership. Without question, the Bible is a male book (p. 130).

The above passage acknowledges the undeniable singular influence of the male voice and value system in the composition, reading, and interpretation of scripture. Although beyond the scope of this article, a similar parallel and voice is evident in the legacy of slavery within the United States as slave masters—many of whom were preachers—used biblical scriptures to justify and uphold the institution of slavery. In instances of disobedience, for example, the holy word was reinforced with the most heinous and severe forms of physical punishment known to man—yet conveniently referred to as discipline in the name of the Lord (see Douglass, 1845).

Over time, various religious bodies have begun to recognize and acknowledge the symbolic reality of patriarchal scripture, proof-texting, and the potential for IPV within this context. Indeed, many denominations have taken reasonable measures to eliminate IPV and the physical domination of women. Some denominations have sermons especially designed to acknowledge and raise awareness about this issue. Yet, the transition from male domination to equality has been neither swift nor smooth. Rather, some victims, seeking refuge in the wisdom and comfort of clergy, often times received further unexpected condemnation instead of sympathy and compassion (see Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988). For instance, some are reminded that marriage is God's holiest institution and encouraged to remain silent, persevere, and lean on His everlasting words. Moreover, they are reminded that "what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Taken from the King James Version (KJV, Matthew, 19.6), this injunction is often a part of the Christian marriage ceremony that reemphasizes God's authority over man, and by extension, man's authority over women.

Concepts originating from male patriarchy assume added dimensions when examining the often-heard expression 'the rule of thumb.' This expression is thought to have derived from English common law that allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick, so long as it was no thicker than his thumb. In 1782, Judge Sir Francis Buller is reported as having made this legal ruling. However, while the judge was notoriously harsh in his punishments, there is no evidence that he ever made the ruling that he is infamously known for (Bachman & Coker, 1995). Edward Foss, in his authoritative work, *The Judges of England*, 1870, wrote that, despite a searching investigation, no substantial evidence exists to support this opinion. Despite the phrase being in common use since the 18th century and appearing many thousands of times in print, it was not associated with wife beating until the 1970s. Hoff-Sommers (1994) suspects that the link between the phrase "rule of thumb" and wife beating is a feminist-inspired myth of recent vintage. In her book *Who Stole Feminism?*, Hoff-Sommers (1994) credits Canadian folklorist Philip Hiscock for clarifying the origin of this expression. Arguing that the phrase came into metaphorical

use by the late eighteenth century, Hiscock alleges "[t]he real explanation of 'rule of thumb' is that it derives from wood workers... who knew their trade so well they rarely or never fell back on the use of such things as rulers. Consequently, carpenters and other craftsmen would measure things simply by 'the length of their thumbs'" (Hoff-Sommers, 1994, p. 203).

Closely aligned to this is the more contemporary expression of a "beat down," which generally connotes some type of verbal or physical assault on another person.<sup>3</sup> Gaining in popularity, this expression has found its way into the lexicon of popular media where the apparent level of violence involved is minimized (and de-emphasized) as witnesses regard a "beat down" as a cool topic of conversation, similar to: "man, look at Hannah's face. She really got a beat down from that bum." The popularity of this expression has led to a growing line of commercial products, including coffee mugs, t-shirts, and magnets, and has realized a modest measure of commercial success. Clearly, this expression, however popular and innocent, conveys messages of using violence to resolve conflict. Therefore, it is not surprising that some people, immersed in a culture of violence, threaten to perpetrate a "beat down" on children, peers, love ones, partners, and spouses alike.<sup>4</sup>

### *Proof—Texting*

Fortune and Enger (2005, p. 2) assert that the practice of "proof-texting (the selective use of scripture, usually out of context) is commonly used to justify one's actions." Perhaps the clearest example can be seen with the practice of corporal punishment. Various bible verses that appear to advocate the use of physical discipline on children are found in the book of Proverbs (on at least six separate occasions). Two verses in particular read: "He who spareth the rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him correcteth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24, King James Version), and "Withhold not correction from a child: for if thou strike him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell." (Proverbs 23:13-14, King James Version).<sup>5</sup> Both conservative and liberal readings of these proverbs have yielded varied, yet noticeably different interpretations. As to their origins, religious conservatives generally believe that the book of Proverbs was assembled by King Solomon and

<sup>3</sup> In popular culture a beat down can be paraphrased in terms of either a verbal and/or physical assault. Literally, it is understood as the act of physically assaulting another person.

<sup>4</sup> "The Devil is beating his wife" is an expression, often heard in the southern parts of the United States that appears to support IPV. It is commonly associated with the appearance of a sun shower: an unusual meteorological phenomenon where rain is falling while the sun is shining. Before anyone readily accepts this notion, however, it is appropriate to question whether the devil (or anyone for that matter) would beat their wife? See Hendrickson (2000) for further reference.

<sup>5</sup> The adage "spare the rod and spoil the child" is often attributed to the Christian Bible. However, it first appeared in a poem by Samuel Butler in 1664. For further reading, see Rossi, H. (2005).

that passages, which dealt with spanking, presumably reflected his parenting beliefs (Boadt, 1984)). Religious liberals, on the other hand, tend to believe King Solomon first introduced "ancient oriental 'wisdom' to Israel and... the actual authors of Proverbs were the successive generations of wisdom teachers (or 'wise men') who had charge of the moral and practical training of young men of the court and upper classes" (Dentan, 1991, p. 304). As such, "sparing the rod" was literally interpreted as a parent's failure to discipline a child that could lead to immorality, disrespect, and disobedience. Conversely, an alternative interpretation suggests that parents should avoid using the rod (to facilitate corporal punishment), given its potential for physical—if not psychological abuse. Ostensibly, in both instances, biblical support for corporal punishment and the physical domination and discipline of children is dependent on one's biblical persuasion and remains a matter of interpretation.

As with children, there are similar and numerous accounts of male domination and control over women in the Bible. For some conservative Christians, the seeds of male domination over women were planted in the Garden of Eden where in the book of Genesis it reads: "And the rib that the Lord God has taken from the man he made into a woman" (Genesis, 2:22, King James Version)<sup>6</sup> Given the alleged transgressions of Eve, women have since been regarded by many as somewhat "one-step removed" from the image of God. Because women had already led to the fall of man, and the argument goes, "it was right that he whom woman led into wrongdoing would have her under his direction so that he might not fail a second time through female levity" (Roy, 1977).

Deeply ingrained within the above passages are images of subservience, obedience, and submission of women unto men (i.e., wives unto husbands). The failure to adhere to these marital expectations creates conflict that originates as emotional abuse, escalates into forms of moderate chastisement, and culminates in more severe violence. This progression could result from a selective reading of the following passage (where female adultery intersects with male jealousy), which provides enough ammunition for some men to use violence.

When a wife while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself or when a spirit of jealousy comes on a man and he is jealous of his wife, then he shall set the woman before the Lord and the priest shall apply the entire law unto her (Numbers 5:29, King James Version).

Given the general tendencies of religious leaders to ignore or fail to acknowledge abuse within its congregation—even in instances of adultery—they might appear complicit in the eyes of many. Nonetheless, some men might insist on their right to control their wives and justify that claim by referencing the expressions of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. There, he wrote:

Submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the

head of the church, His body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so in addition, wives should submit to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22-24, King James Version).

While this directive tends to perpetuate the control of wives by husbands, the larger problem is that some men do not acknowledge the verses that immediately follow, where husbands are instructed on how to treat their wives. It reads:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (Ephesians 5:25-28, King James Version)

The above scripture serves to remind [Christians] of an obligation to do unto others, as they would have others do unto them: to love their neighbors as they love God, and to love their *wife* as God loves the church. The book of Matthew (7:12, King James Version) expresses these sentiments and reminds us that these are the laws of the prophets.

### A Matter of Faith

Some researchers acknowledge the irony, ambivalence, and contradictory nature of a victim's dilemma where "religion and spirituality [can] serve either as mechanisms for achieving resilience in the face of domestic assault or as contributors to women's vulnerability" (Bell & Mattis, 2000; Potter, 2007). Ironically, Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) found that women viewed both their experiences and recovery from abuse as occurring within the context of their faith. As one would hope, certain religious beliefs should function as a protective factor against IPV. Some females, for example, who seek partners who have similar religious and spiritual values have been shown to experience less violence (Higginbotham, Ketring, Hibbert, Wright, & Guarino, 2007:). Of those who experienced IPV, however, serious questions tend to emerge. For instance, to what extent should victims (as believers) trust in the Lord that all things

<sup>6</sup> Translations of bible verses tend to vary by their source. Regarding the origin of Eve, we find at least three different translations of Genesis 2:22, beginning with the King James Version: And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man (Genesis, 2:22). The American Standard Bible (1995) reads slightly different as: The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib, which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man (Genesis 2:22). God's Word Creation (1995) also differs slightly as: Then the LORD God formed a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man. He brought her to the man (Genesis, 2:22). For purposes of this article, all translations reflect the King James Version (2011).

will work out? Should parishioners who are victims of IPV seek retribution for their pain and suffering? In the book of Romans (12:19) the Apostle Paul writes, "beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." While this scripture is comforting and reassuring to victims, a strict adherence and reliance on it does not necessarily remove victims from danger. Ostensibly, when faith and patience are pitted against one's natural temptation for retribution and human justice, the resulting dilemma is both vexing and painstaking.

Regrettably, some of the literature on battered (Christian) women tends to suggest that highly religious victims interpret their victimization as divinely ordained. In general, battered women who were strongly religious tended to interpret their experiences of abuse according to the Genesis stories and the creation of the fall (Tkacz, 2006). Sermons that speak without nuance of the virtue of "submitting to the will of God," for example, or of the way in which "God sends us suffering to test our faith," may have critical or even fatal consequences when embraced by those who might consider leaving abusive partners (Tkacz, 2006). Ironically, yet perhaps expected, men who batter also cite scripture to insist that their partners forgive them. For example, in the very midst of the Lord's prayer, believers, in beseeching forgiveness for their own sins, are reminded that they too, must forgive others, regardless of circumstances (see Matthew 6:9-15).

Potter (2007) found that Christian women were obviously disappointed when some pastors made recommendations for the women to pray about the relationship and to make greater attempts at being a "good wife" (p. 278). Regrettably, these suggestions and admonitions are rather peculiar in their stereotypical design and makeup and appear racialized to some extent. For instance, some Christian women suggested their pastors appeared to hold the stereotypical image of the Black woman as a strong woman (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2003; Sudarkasa, 1996), who was capable of withstanding and contending with abuse by an intimate partner.

### Exploring Solutions

The foregoing discussion has attempted to document and describe the dynamics and religious context of IPV. While this study is not without limitations,<sup>7</sup> the remaining discussion focuses on ways to address this troubling issue. To that end, some research suggests that religious communities can provide a safe haven and resource for the victims of abuse, particularly through the informal support networks of churchwomen (Cox, 1989; Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Nason-Clark, 2004). At the same time, it is perhaps more difficult for some religious leaders than other service providers to acknowledge the realities of IPV, as they are called upon to uphold the values and beliefs of the church while responding practically to the needs of victims (Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2005). To handle these tensions, religious leaders must confront the theologically sensitive issues of sex roles, marriage and divorce, the history of the church's treatment of women,

the sanctity of personhood, and the practical realities of their own limitations as a counselor (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988). Research shows that many spiritual leaders are woefully unprepared to deal with IPV (Cwick, 1996; Miles, 2000). As a matter of fact, Miles (2000), in the book, *Domestic Violence, What Every Pastor Needs to Know*, suggests that the theological training and beliefs given most clergy might actually contribute to increased violence and abuse of women.

For clergy who try to successfully intervene in domestic violence situations, the research findings are rather interesting. For instance, Ware, Levitt, and Bayer (2003) found that religious leaders who endorsed female submission tended to promote interventions that protected the marriage over those that provided the wife with the support to divorce or separate. Moreover, rather than emphasize a doctrine of mutual submission, religious leaders attempt to control perpetrators through penance, peer mentoring, and restrictions on their religious participation.

In addition to research exploring the effects of religious sanctions within the church, there has been a growing scholarly interest in the role of faith-based services for perpetrators of domestic violence outside of the church (see Nason-Clark, 2004). Here, evidence suggests that clients in a faith-based batterer intervention program are more likely to complete the requirements than men enrolled in secular equivalents. Moreover, abusive men in the faith-based program who "were encouraged by their priests or pastors to attend had higher completion rates than those whose attendance was mandated by the courts" (Nason-Clark, 2004, p. 307).

To complement and further promote secular interventions, some have suggested that the prospect of prohibiting and successfully punishing domestic violence depends, foremost, on the state's willingness and capacity to reform criminal and family laws. Yet, even here, some feel that the possibility of state-sponsored reforms is strongly affected by social beliefs and ideologies about gender and family relations (Hijjar, 2004, p. 9). After all, most religious leaders place a high priority on maintaining the family unit.

Despite these advances, there are those who regard the physical discipline of women as no more egregious than the use of corporal punishment on children, as both falls within man's dominion. Whether we accept or reject these notions, perhaps the biggest obstacle to change is the deeply ingrained and cultural relationship between Judeo-Christian scripture and male patriarchy. Like Siamese twins conjoined at the torso, separating religious imperatives from sex/role expectations requires a very delicate procedure where the survival of one depends very much on the survival of the other. Sep-

<sup>7</sup> A potential limitation of this literature review is that the search was limited to articles and journals retrieved from only five data bases, Criminal Justice Abstracts, JSTOR, PsyINFO, Religious Studies, and The Association of Religious Data Archives, which tend to increase the probability of inadequate sampling. The significance of utilizing multiple channels for obtaining research articles is essential for increasing validity of the integrative review (Cooper, 1984). Undoubtedly, other articles exist but were excluded from review if they were not found on the aforementioned searches at the time of review.

arating IPV from patriarchal scripture is equally challenging as they appear to go hand-in-hand, like love and marriage, where hopes of a peaceful co-existence hinge on the confluence of compassion, understanding, and mutual submission. Still, it is important to question whether the New Testament supports male patriarchy. Moreover, we must treat the Old and New Testaments separately rather than conflating them as the Christian scripture.

There are indications that historical theologians are beginning to respond to this challenge. In-depth examinations of the theory and practice of the subordination of women and the recovery of women are appearing more and more frequently (West, 2006). "Churches must also be accountable for the ways that scriptures, liturgies, icons, policies, and teachings uphold the subjugation of women" (West, 2006, p. 244). In a similar vein, religious institutions and churches need to identify organizational structures and institutional practices that deny women an authoritative voice within the church. This includes explicit affirmations of the integrity and worth of a woman's body and sexuality, with direct references to the inclusion of everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation (West, 2006).

### Conclusion

Clearly, certain sections of the Christian Scripture and their patriarchal and church context are inherently problematic as they can contribute to cultural and individual interpretations that support violence against women. In the process, Bent-Godley and Fowler (2006) suggests that evoking guilt by stressing the need to forgive an abuser seems common. Moreover:

Understanding the myriad of ways in which interpretations of the Bible are manipulated and how religious practice and spirituality are affected is critical for preventing the retraumatization of women by their faith-based communities (p. 291).

Likewise, the same Christian Scriptures and church context can also prevent or lessen violence against women. In the previous decade ninety-five percent of churchwomen reported they had never heard a specific message on abuse preached from the pulpit of their church (Nason-Clark (1997). Furthermore, some Christian women may endure various forms of abuse (whether physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual) but may not regard it as abuse.

Recently, efforts to educate and promote public awareness about IPV within the religious community has gained momentum. Religious leaders are beginning to employ a number of strategies, including premarital counseling sessions, marriage enrichment classes, and singles groups designed to promote an awareness and constructive dialogue about the reality of IPV. Perhaps most important in resolving this matter is an increase awareness of the egalitarian principle of mutual submission. For instance, biblical scholars contend that the bible does not mandate wifely submission, but rather "mutual submission" between wives and husbands (Follis,

1981; Scanzoni & Hardesty, 1992). According to some researchers, mutual submission is more authentically Christian because both spouses recognize that they must follow Jesus Christ's model of self-sacrifice and other-centeredness in family decision-making (Bartowski & Read, 2003).

In terms of working with domestic violence offenders, it is important to underscore the positive aspects of religious involvement and its potential to enhance efforts toward offender rehabilitation. Moreover, some studies suggest that regular religious attendance is inversely related to abuse among both men and women (Ellison & Anderson, 2002; O'Connor & Duncan, 2011). Other studies, commissioned by the American Psychological Association, found that humanistic, spiritual, and religious pathways play an important part in the desistance process (see Bonta & Andrews, 2101; O'Connor & Duncan; Norcorss & Wampold, 2010). For example, within the Oregon prison system O'Connor and Duncan (2011) examined the religious involvement of those incarcerated (during the first year) and found a "diverse and widespread human, social, and spiritual capital that [was] naturally supportive" in reducing violence (p. 608).

Findings of this nature are significant and especially important, given their potential to inform practice. Moreover, social workers, probation officers, and therapists who work with domestic violence offenders need to explore how their client's particular spirituality and religious beliefs might affect their attitude toward the use of violence in relationships. For those who are incarcerated and sincerely interested in finding spiritual pathways to turn their lives around, what better place to start than with the principle of mutual submission? Upon doing so, it is important to appreciate the complex nature of scripture while guarding against misinterpretations that could further promote intimate partner violence.

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