

REA Annual Meeting 2014/November 7-9/Chicago
Colloquy C 2.9/Saturday 1:45pm
Presenter: Muriel Schmid, PhD
Affiliation: Christian Peacemaker Teams, Program Director
Email: program@cpt.org
Phone: 801-809-5495

Who Wears the Stole in the Family? Women Ordination and Cultural Violence

Précis:

The 2006 U.N. report on violence against women sees religion as one of the main factors that contribute to it. Following Galtung's distinction between three levels of violence (direct, structural, and cultural) while placing patriarchy under the category of cultural violence, illuminates the relationship between religion and all forms of violence perpetrated against women. Based on the example of the struggle for women's ordination in the Catholic and LDS Churches, this paper discusses the correlation between patriarchy, violence, religious representations, and ethical responsibility.

a. Main concepts/issues:

Violence against women is one of the most wide-spread forms of violence. In the past few years, the U.N. and the World Health Organization have been conducting several studies in order to assess the situation and encourage better practices worldwide, illuminating the fact that forms of violence against women are endemic and omnipresent, from domestic violence to sex trafficking, from femicide to mutilations. Based on the latest findings from the WHO (2013), 35% of women experience physical or sexual violence in their intimate relationship; this number does not take into account all the other forms of violence experienced by women. The 2006 U.N. report on violence against women repeats over and over that religion is one of the main factors that contribute to all forms of violence against women, justifying structures of oppression such as patriarchy and other discriminatory practices. The U.N. report reminds its readers that in order to eradicate all forms of violence against women, programs need to address all levels of violence and thus it is imperative to enroll religious communities in this effort.

Johan Galtung has established categories of violence that are now widely recognized and used. Galtung distinguishes between direct (often physical) violence, structural violence, and cultural violence; he adds that all three levels are interconnected. One level of violence, be it physical, structural or cultural, cannot be fully eradicated without addressing the other two levels. Moreover, if physical and structural forms of violence are often easy to identify, cultural violence is harder to name and dismantle as it penetrates and sustains most of our social and religious representations—Galtung himself came to identify it 20 years after he had started publishing on physical and structural forms of violence. And yet, cultural violence represents the ultimate legitimization for other types of violence.

Patriarchy is a form of cultural violence and it has implications at the two other levels of violence, structural and physical. What feminist theologians have been tirelessly denouncing for the past 30 years cannot be confined to a mere intellectual, exegetical struggle, but their critique of patriarchy is linked to a broader struggle against violence perpetrated against women. In this sense, Churches, believers, and religious leaders have a central role to play in dismantling cultural violence against women; in many ways, this is not a choice, but a serious ethical responsibility.

When we talk about violence against women, Islam has become the scapegoat for many Westerners, especially in the post-9/11 era. Whether or not we think Islam promotes

discriminatory practices against women, Christianity needs to address its own discriminatory practices—gender equality in Christian denominations is not yet a given. From October 30 to November 8, 2013, the World Council of Churches held its 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea, marking the 60th anniversary of the WCC. The WCC has worked on gender equality all along; it sees it as a central element of the fight for justice in which Churches have an essential role to play. In Busan, women held a pre-conference event to remind the WCC's members of the importance of continuing this fight. Since neither the Catholic Church nor the LDS Church (Mormon Church) are official members of the WCC, women belonging to those traditions who fight for equality represent a powerful case-study.

The Ordain Women movement in the LDS Church and the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement are excellent examples of efforts made at the grassroots level to fight inequality in specific Christian denominations. Examining their actions and their work provides an opportunity to evaluate the role of women and their allies in dismantling cultural violence in the Christian tradition. Furthermore, their work unmask the correlation between language, rituals, and exclusion. Fighting within their own tradition, the women seeking ordination in the Roman Catholic Church and the LDS Church are not only challenging a well-established tradition nor do they simply demand to be able to do what men do, they revisit biblical texts, they interrogate doctrinal statements, they rewrite liturgies, and they break down the organization of sacred spaces. In so doing, their example inspire men and women in their respective tradition to rethink structures of power and their ramifications. The struggle for women's ordination in Christian traditions that do not accept it does not happen in a vacuum. It points towards the importance of looking at violence in a holistic way and thus opens avenues to undo oppression where we are and engage religious groups to participate in this effort.

Linda Woodhead's sociological research on gender, religion, and power offers an invaluable model to think about grassroots initiatives that empower women in Churches and congregations. She categorizes women's activities navigating patriarchal structures into four spheres (consolidating, tactical, questing, and countercultural) that allow for creative resistance. Her model helps situate various forms of resistance, including the ordination movements, in the larger context of the struggle to eradicate violence against women.

b. Methodology for addressing the topic:

The presentation will be divided into four sections: a general overview of the data regarding violence against women and its religious roots; a brief discussion on how religion actively contributes to what Galtung identifies as cultural violence; an illustration of the specific correlation between the struggle for equality and the broader fight against cultural violence with the examples of the LDS Ordain Women movement and the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement; finally, inspired by Woodhead's work, a list of practical recommendations to empower Christian women and their allies to fight cultural violence.

c. Sources grounding the presentation:

2006 U.N. Report on women:

<http://www.unwomen.org/>

WCC pre-conference on women equality:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc2019s-60-year-journey-for-gender-justice-continues>

LDS Ordain Women movement:

<http://ordainwomen.org/>

RCWP movement:

<http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/>

Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research*, 27/3 (August 1990): 291-305.

Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" in: *Journal of Peace Research* 6/3 (1969): 167-191.

Linda Woodhead, "Gender Differences in Religious Practice and Significance" in: James Beckford and N J. Demerath III (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, SAGE Publications, 2007: 566-586.

Linda Woodhead, "Women and Religion" in: Linda Woodhead et alii (eds), *Religions in Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, Routledge 2002: 332-356.

d. The status of the research at the time of the proposal:

This paper is a work in-progress; a version of it was presented at the Mormon Women Forum in fall 2013.