CHRISTIANITY PATRIARCHY and ABUSE

A Feminist Critique

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3

And A Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse

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Until this century, parental treatment of children, short of murder, was considered a private matter, the proper domain of the home in which women did the primary work. Few theologians have examined the underlying structures of child abuse in religious doctrines. I believe that this is so partly because child rearing, as the responsibility largely of women, has not been regarded as a serious theological topic. Hence, the subject of children as a religious issue was placed under the less prestigious area of Christian education. I propose to examine here the theological implications of our having ignored children as a theological subject.

Child abuse is the result of many complicated problems. If we are to protect our children, we must examine all the issues surrounding abuse, rather than just blame parents. I believe that patriarchy is the encompassing social system that sanctions child abuse. Theologically, the patriarchal family has been and continues to be a cornerstone for christological doctrines, especially in father-son imagery and in the unquestioned acceptance of benign paternalism as the norm for divine power. The following feminist analysis will examine the implicit structure of parent-child relationships in patriarchal families and the problems with theological doctrines based on the social structures of a patriarchal society. I will conclude this examination with a few suggestions for understanding Christ without reinforcing the destructive patterns of the patriarchal family and its power systems.

Patriarchy, which is neither inevitable nor universal, has emerged

through a complex process. Charlotte B. O'Kelly and Larry S. Carney claim that a series of factors in agrarian and pastoral societies led to male dominance and the formation of patriarchy. These factors include the development of the value of possessions, either land or animals, a hostile environment with scarce resources, and, most important, warfare. The shift away from the social organization of many foraging societies, which are characterized by cooperation, egalitarianism, flexibility in human relationships, extensive kinship systems, social stability, and individual integrity and freedom, is a shift toward male dominance and more hostile and insecure selves. With the rise of male dominance and warfare, the structure of kinship focused on the patriarchal family, with a shift toward control-oriented parenting, socialized gender differences, and separate societal roles and spheres of operation.[1]

This basic social structure of the patriarchal family, a structure that socializes women for domestic responsibility and men for dominance and aggression in public arenas, represents an important element in Christian theology. Christological doctrines use analogies to the patriarchal family to articulate the meaning of Christ. These doctrines assume the unquestioned norm of the patriarchal family. Hence, I believe such christological doctrines reflect views of divine power that sanction child abuse on a cosmic scale and sustain benign paternalism.[2] In justifying this assertion about child abuse and Christology, I will begin with the self-identities produced by the patriarchal family, discuss the implications for how such people in our male-dominated society understand relationships, show the connection to Christology, and propose an alternative way to understand divine incarnation.

SELF-IDENTITY

Our definition of ourselves is crucial to both our understanding of relationships and the restructuring of our religious ideas, which are under feminist attack as androcentric. A number of recent feminist works have analyzed the impact of sex-role stereotyping and the allocation of tasks by gender on our culture's views of self. Many feminist gender-based analyses of self-identity assert that divergent views of the self occur in males and females. This current feminist shift in focus from views of equality characteristic of the 1970s to an examination of the value of the difference women's socialization brings to our species has emerged with the critical mass of women required to develop a new

intellectual consciousness. While most feminists who examine uniquely female ways of seeing tend to assert that differences in gender identity are socially produced, we believe the differences are important for understanding androcentrism and male dominance.[3] Much of the data used to indicate the differences is not new, but the interpretation and valuation of the differences are.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Nancy Chodorow characterizes the masculine self, a product of Western industrialized capitalist society, as sharply ego-identified and oriented toward goals, tasks, and rules. Male identity is based on differentiation from others, on generalized, abstract masculine roles, and on the rejection of femininity and denial of affective relation. The male sees himself as (1) needing to remain apart from relationships and affiliation; (2) proven by success in competitive contexts, and (3) reaching maturation through achievement of autonomy in the public sphere. That is, he becomes the good warrior and protector.

The feminine self is characterized by Chodorow as highly focused on affiliation and affective relationships, an orientation important to nurturing life in the domestic sphere. Females develop a sense of identity by connecting to others and remain more particularistic and context-oriented. The female feels herself incomplete without a complex of relationships of differing kinds. The female avoids open conflict and competition and feels herself confirmed in the capacity to nurture others. That is, she becomes the good warrior's protectee, servant, nurse, and breeder.

Chodorow concludes that sex-role stereotyping in the patriarchal family structures of our culture reproduces the two views of self. She asserts that extremely divergent and neurotic forms of masculine and feminine identity occur when the primary caretaker of children is control-oriented. Neurotic masculine identity is brittle, isolated, and afraid of relatedness, associating intimacy with violence; it wants the domination and control of others and uses a rigid and punitive superego to control itself and others; and it is rebellious, especially against anything feminine. Neurotic feminine identity lacks any separate sense of self; it is formed by the demands of others, especially by the superego structures of another; it perceives itself as victim; it is dependent upon external relationships; and will use inappropriate others, such as children, to fill the consuming emotional needs of an insecure ego.

Views of power are closely linked to stereotyped masculine and

feminine self-identities. Power is how the self feels itself present, alive, and sustained in the world. The possession and use of power is yoked to self-esteem and self-protection. David McClelland notes that the male experiences power as something he gains, drawing more and more to himself and using the acquired power to gain more over against others who threaten his power.[4] Involvement with others is tied to a qualification of power and identity. Strength is the ability to control things external to the self. This view of power is inherently competitive and hierarchical, essential to capitalism and the nuclear arms race.

McClelland found a different experience of power in traditional females, one based in their childrearing roles. Feminine power involves the need to nurture others. In giving of herself to others to facilitate and empower their growth, the female feels powerful. Hence the feminine view of power is grounded in generosity, empathy, yielding, and relinquishment.

Both masculine and feminine selves see possessing power, in each of their distinctive forms, as essential to self-worth. In a system of dominance and submission these two views of power require each other. The feminine view of power does not interfere with the masculine need to dominate; exploiter male and exploited female go hand in hand. A deep unrest stirs in such a polarized system of identity and power. Chodorow believes the system contains its own implosive self-destruction because the system produces unhappy, unstable selves who use power to exploit others.

Both gender-linked views of self and power, especially in extreme form, are fraught with difficulties. Even as it uses the reality of women's experience as a resource, the feminist solution must go further than a gender-based concept. Research on crosscultural gender roles and on people who cross gender lines in our culture indicates that few gender-linked traits are biologically inevitable. Our society's hope and our planet's survival lie in our capacity to free ourselves from rigid gender roles, especially as they feed structures of dominance and submission.[5] Feminist analyses of gender-based identity have been an important critical tool for examining the extent to which androcentrism has been the dominant bias of Western thought. In addition, such analysis has helped us see what alternatives women provide for understanding relationships.

Most feminists would assert that all human beings are relational beings. We are, therefore, profoundly connected to one another, an

important insight that androcentrism has tended to obscure. This insight is gained from women's role in the early formative stages of self-formation and from feminist reflection upon our adult life together. Hence, this discussion of self begins with the assumption that relationship is essential to self.[6]

An important distinction must be drawn, however, between the intimacy of relationship and the fusion of parent-child relationships under patriarchy. Alice Miller, a Swiss object-relations therapist, contends that virtually all childrearing in our culture is control oriented.[7] The use of control takes away a child's sense of distinct identity and subsumes it as an extension of parental will. Whether parents use techniques such as positive reinforcement or physical abuse, the parents shape the child into a being who reflects the parent's needs or wishes. Miller believes that all children need care—protection, security, touching, tenderness, and emotional connection—and that they have a right to express their needs and have them respected. The use of control and punishment of any sort abuses children, producing lifelong damaging effects. Children learn to bury their own feelings and needs, to rely on false selves that mirror their parents' feelings and needs, and to respect the powers of authority and dominance, rather than their own feelings and needs. Without direct access to one's feelings and the ability to express them, intimacy is impossible.

Miller's description of parenting fits the picture, given in O'Kelly and Carney, of the shift away from the care-oriented childrearing of foraging societies to the more repressive, controlling practices of horticultural, pastoral, and agrarian societies, which have become the dominant global forms of social organization. If we align Miller's analysis of false selves with Chodorow's analysis of masculine and feminine identity, we can begin to see that both gender-linked views of self are false.[8] Both the male who invests himself in goals, competition, and control and the female self that relies upon dependency, approval, and nurturing others rest their self-worth upon the world outside themselves. Their sense of worth lies in the denial of their own subjectivity, leading to the denial of their own feelings and needs. Hence, their true selves are replaced by false selves that exploit or are exploited by the world, and they seek ways to meet their needs for self-esteem through their reenactment of early parent-child patterns in which they have lost their capacity for intimacy.

While Miller does not focus her work on gender difference, her

claims about control, combined with Chodorow's thesis about the creation of gender difference, imply that one of the main factors that create sharp gender differences in our culture is the rearing of children by persons, primarily mothers, who seek to use children to meet adult needs or who seek to control children. For many women in Western culture little beyond domestic work is available to meet the adult human need for creativity and fulfilling, productive work. In addition, the social power structures of male dominance make the control of those less powerful a norm in human interactions.

Rather than creating confident selves capable of intimacy, childrearing in male-dominated Western culture causes the fusion of selves. Harriett Coldhor Lerner[9] points out that in early relationships in which family members are too fused and parents are unable to see their children as separate from themselves several reactions ensue. People will believe others "cause" their behavior and will be unable to see their reactions as their own. Since such relationships are emotionally highly charged, a child may react by rebellion and pushing away. These reactions maintain fusion because both parties continue to see each other's behavior and reactions as "caused" by the other. If, on the other hand, a child reacts by remaining dependent, the fusion causes a child to feel guilty and therefore negatively about itself if it makes any attempt to separate, assert itself, or get angry. Selves in such families are confused.

The underlying difficulty in confused relationships, either in provoking reactions of rebellion and separation (angry or bossy response) or in reactions of dependency and need (helpless or depressive response), is that neither reaction produces selves who recognize true intimacy or respect the separateness and difference of others. Hence males who seek dominance and females who are compliant and dependent are not capable of much intimacy.

Fused relationships begin in the patriarchal family, but once the orientation is internalized, extend themselves into social systems. Parents who have been denied their selves in childhood and have not reclaimed them as adults have not had their need for love and respect met. As Chodorow also contends, such parents will use their children for their own needs. Miller states that rather than welcoming the child as a separate being with its own needs, requiring love and gentle respect, parents will see the child as someone who can be shaped to love them as they want to be loved or as someone who can be molded

into the person they have always wanted to be, thereby protecting themselves from their own sense of failure. The parents will often treat the child in what they believe are loving ways, "stoning it with kisses," as Miller says, or using positive reinforcement. These benign forms of control still focus authority and truth in the parent. A child is expected to obey the will of a benign parent because that parent knows best. However, the primary orientation toward the child is still one of control.

Not even in the practice of benign parenting is the child seen as the source of wisdom for the parent. Miller believes this attitude of control is grounded in a long history of using children to meet adult needs such as compensation for feelings of inferiority, a receptacle for unwanted feelings, an opportunity to exercise power, or a way to obtain pleasure that should be gotten from adults. Hence, children become victims of the parents' false selves.

If the parents of a child are control oriented in a more punitive and violent way, the consequences for the child's self-identity are far more devastating. Miller contends that all punishment used by parents chips away at the child's true self by shutting down its capacity to feel. The humiliation of children through abuse has been regarded as the means to shape children "for their own good." But such methods produce intense pain and suffering. Without someone to confirm feelings of suffering from the humiliation of punishment, children must bury their pain, for children cannot integrate experiences alone.

As adults, such children will split off their own pain and project it upon others by punishing their own children or by victimizing others weaker than themselves, a pattern that parallels masculine gender identity. As long as the pain remains buried, the person will be unable to empathize with another's pain or identify with victims of oppression. More typical of feminine gender identity is the tendency to seek sources outside the self that repeat the abusive punishments of childhood. Whether the reenactment of abuse is inflicted upon others or the self, the adult will blame the abuse on the abused.

One of the most devastating combinations of elements in childrearing described by Miller is the loving-punitive parent. The child receives both painful punishment and loving support from the same parent. In doing so, the child links the two together, confusing abuse with love. As an adult, a child so reared will be unable to accept or give a healthy, nondestructive love. Miller describes the emotional bonds of abusive

love as more compelling than true intimacy unless the self is able to differentiate the two.

The false self produced by dominance and abuse is a self that rests its self-esteem in winning approval from significant others by empathetic union and/or success and achievement. In either case, the false self is held together by its ability to use others and the external world. The false self has lost the capacity to feel intense passions, and so is haunted by depression. It will idealize its parents and past, place blame for abuse on victims, and be unable to recognize healthy intimacy. Finally, the false self will seek to reproduce itself in others over whom it has control. All attempts to manage, change, and control a child produce a false self in the child. This thesis is Miller's most radical, for it demonstrates the fundamental relationship between the false self and power as the need for dominance, even when that dominance is benign.

Miller points out that well-meaning parents use control to train their children. They employ techniques such as deprivation of food or solitary confinement, entrapment, manipulation, emotional isolation, humiliation, embarrassment, cruelty, and physical pain. These techniques are supposed to teach a child love, respect for others, honesty, kindness, a love of truth, and the value of nonviolence. With such contradictory messages, *the only clear lesson is the value of power and authority.* The child learns that status and degree of power-over determine whether actions are judged good or bad. Hence, the more controlling and punishing the parent, the more the child will "behave" only when it fears a higher, punitive authority, and the more an adult so raised will seek power as a means of self-protection and as an opportunity to dominate others. In addition, the adult will protect authority from criticism, educate all those under his or her control to respect authority, and expect to sacrifice him or herself to higher authority. Again, as in the earlier analysis of gender-linked power, this system is immediately power as power-over. Exploiter and exploited require each other.

Power as dominance manifests itself in interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions. Miller believes the false self behaves well by self-control over internal feelings that conflict with "right" behavior. Thus, the false self denies the subjectivity of the true self, using volition to suppress and control feeling. The false self uses its will to oppress the true self.

In a world that respects relationship rather than authority, Miller

envisions that the rights of children will be respected and that we will begin to learn from them.

> Theoretically, I can imagine that someday we will regard our children not as creatures to manipulate or to change but rather as messengers from a world we once deeply knew, but which we have long since forgotten, who can reveal to us more about the true secrets of life, and also our own lives, than our parents were ever able to. We do not need to be told whether to be strict or permissive with our children. What we do need is to have respect for their needs, their feelings, and their individuality, as well as for our own.[10]

The abilities to act in and through love, to be nonviolent, to be generous, and to respect the rights and needs of others come from having been generously and gently loved and respected. Hence, the matrix of our connectedness is ambivalently powerful and yet essential to us. Our earliest relationships can steal our true selves or mirror them back to us. Without our true selves, morality is grounded in power, not love. This grounding in power as dominance and respect for authority characterizes much of Christian theology.

CHRISTOLOGY

Miller's psychological insights show how the false self needs to respect and protect a nostalgic image of the punitive rights or authority of the dominant parent, a common picture of the divine father. Mary Daly's landmark work *Beyond God the Father* levels clear and compelling charges against the use of masculine images for deity in a male-dominated culture. Criticisms of the patriarchal father image are presented by Charles Hartshorne, who criticizes the alienating nature of parental imagery and the contradiction between worshiping omnipotence and affirming love.[11] Other critics, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Erich Fromm, and Ludwig Feuerbach, have leveled severe criticism at god the father. None, however, has explicitly articulated the relation of the image to child abuse.

While I do not wish to continue the use of the image of god the father, I think the longing in the use of the image needs to be understood because it has been such a powerful and complex metaphor. The very absence of an unconditionally loving and nurturing father in patriarchal society, the need for such love, and the presence of a punitive or distant father in the face of such needs, combined with the

inability of mothers to meet all the needs of children, produce identification with the powerful father as a move toward self-protection, even as children still need love, as Miller and Chodorow contend. In a patriarchal culture, the theology of abused children who need love would, I think, be couched in terms of blame, guilt, and freedom from punishment through love from the father. Such a system requires the projection of any ambivalence onto an outside force or group and the rejection of those who might call the system into question. Alternatively, the longing for parental love might be articulated in the image of a benignly paternalistic father who is not at all punitive and loves all creation unconditionally, yet who is all powerful in control and authority.

If we base an entire theological system either on a human longing for an unreal past or in hierarchical authority, we have a system based in nostalgia, the nostalgia of dominated and abused children, an abuse epidemic in patriarchal culture. A nostalgic system prohibits honesty. Those persons, such as the humanists, psychoanalysts, and feminists I cited above, who seek to be honest about their life experiences in a patriarchal society, will be most alienated from and most likely to see through the destructive and nostalgic elements of the theological system. The honesty of their insights challenges the very structures of the society. As Muriel Rukeyser wrote, "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open."[12]

Classical trinitarian formulas confuse parent and child and husband and wife, such that the father and son, or husband and wife, become one person and such that the father is seen to live some aspect of his own life in his son. Such confusion reflects male-dominant values in which all subordinates to the reigning patriarch are considered extensions of his identity. The confusion, which leads to fusion, is then repeated in the hierarchical bridegroom-bride images of Christ and church. The circularity, abstractness, and incoherence of trinitarian doctrines indicate to me that they tend to reinforce a sense of fusion, which is part of human experience, but which cannot satisfy finally our deepest spiritual needs for images of intimacy. Real intimacy can be grounded only in the contextual, unique, and particular, and in self-awareness. And intimacy is virtually impossible in systems of dominance and abuse.

As an aspect of trinitarian thought, Christology is often based in implicit elements of child abuse. Jesus, in his human aspect, is sacri-

ficed as the one perfect child. His sacrifice upholds the righteousness of the father who otherwise would require obedience from his incapable, sinful children. We are, it is asserted, born with a tragic flaw, and therefore must depend upon the perfect father and other persons with authority to reveal the truth. The punishment earned by us all is inflicted on the one perfect child. Then the father can forgive his wayward creation and love it. The doctrinal dependence upon patriarchal gender systems becomes clear when god as mother is substituted for father. The doctrines are not only virtually incomprehensible, the very suggestion of such substitutions raises enormous negative emotional reactions.

In Christology's more benignly paternalistic forms, the father, who loves all creation, does not desire to punish us. Instead, the father allows the son to suffer the consequences of the evil created by his wayward creation. The father stands by in passive anguish as his most beloved son is killed because the father refuses to interfere, even though he has the latent power to do so. The sacrifice of this perfect son is the way to new life with god the father. The death of the child and the intervention of the father after the punishment is inflicted, through the resurrection, are celebrated as salvific.

Christologies also use androcentric models that parallel warrior-hero images to describe Jesus as self-made through his own efforts, unsullied by assistance from sinful human beings. Jesus is someone who no onger is a member of his time and culture. He is fused into the deity whose will he is reenacting. Hence, Jesus, as the son of his divine father, is more perfect when his will is identical with his father's.

Such doctrines of salvation reflect and support images of benign paternalism, the neglect of children, or, at their worst, child abuse, making such behaviors acceptable as divine behavior—cosmic paternalism, neglect, and child abuse as it were.[13] The father allows, or even inflicts, the death of his only son. The goodness and power of the father and the unworthiness and powerlessness of his children make the father's punishment just and the blame the children's. The loving father's neglect is justified as protecting the freedom of humanity. Theology has tended to protect the authority, omnipotence, and omniscience of the father by justifying suffering as deserved or allowed.

While atonement Christologies emphasize God's grace and forgiveness, making it seem as if God accepts all persons whole without the demand that they be good and free of sin, such acceptance is contingent

upon the abuse of the one perfect child. The experience of grace is lodged here, I believe, in a sense of relief at being relieved of punishment for one's inevitable failings and not in a clear sense of personal worth gained from an awareness of the unconditional nature of love. The shadow of the punitive father must always lurk behind atonement. He haunts images of forgiving grace. Benign paternalism functions by allowing a select group to be in a favored relationship with those in power, in this case with God, but the overall destructiveness of oppressive systems is not challenged by such benevolence. Hence, judgment on the unsaved is a necessary component of atonement.

As Miller points out, the tendency to accept blame for being wrong is characteristic of an abused child. The image of an ideal parent is projected onto a figure who is always right and who is the source of both love and righteous punishment. The projection helps the child manage its sense of rage about being hurt and made wrong. Such projection also usually leads to a need to split off the frightening or negative aspects of the self and project them onto others, as Christian theology has tended to do to women, Jews, and all "unsaved" others who are ready scapegoats.

Given the problematic nature of most christological doctrines, the task of reconstructing our understanding of the meaning of the center of Christianity is formidable. I believe, however, that it can be done. The task begins with the remembrance of a passionate, open, gentle self that feels the full range of human emotions and needs.

Remembrance of self means finding the damaged child inside all of us, the child that was once born whole, full of the grace of loving and needing love. Such a discovery leads us into anger and then grief about our pain, empathy that wells up from self-knowledge, passion that connects our anger to love, and joy in the freedom to love ourselves and others fully. The remembrance brings personal power and worth, power grounded in the capacity to connect with others as a self-aware, self-accepting person. The discovery carries ambivalence, however, for we become aware of how fragile we are. But our strength can come from that awareness of fragility, for only in recognizing it can we reach a healing and transforming self-awareness.

Remembrance of ourselves requires a loving person who helps us search, who is not afraid of the painfulness of the search, and who can mirror back our deeply rediscovered selves. Feminist sisterhood has been, in its best forms, a community of persons who touch each other

through remembering the pain and ambivalence in our lives, claiming and feeling our anger, reconnecting to our bodies, and affirming sensuality and passion. The telling of truth about our lives in the midst of a community that cherishes that truth is the power of consciousness-raising that birthed this second feminist wave.[14]

In claiming our lost selves, we gain the self-acceptance crushed by patriarchy. To act out of our self-awareness does not mean conquering our self's urges and gaining self-control or surrendering our destiny to the control of others. To act well we must be willing to listen to our deepest needs and feelings and to transform self and world through the healing energies of an honest and dangerous memory that empowers us to give and receive love. Through that healing energy we may choose, in solidarity with those who suffer, to give ourselves to their struggle, but that solidarity, when it emerges from our self-awareness, is not an act of self-sacrifice, but of self-possession and connection to others.

We are most transformed, however, not by abstract ideas and theories, but by the living presence of others and by concrete images of transformation that allow us to claim our deepest feelings. Nelle Morton, in "The Goddess as Metaphoric Image," discusses the central importance of vivid, personal images that lead us through the ambivalence of our lives toward a vision of integrated wholeness.[15] Morton describes a waking vision she has of her dead mother, who apologizes to her for teaching her negative things about her body. In that apology her mother appeals to Morton to embrace and love her own distinctive body in all its life-giving ambivalence. Through an image that includes her own particular past pain and her present dis-ease, Morton is guided by her vision of her mother and of the goddess toward a transformation of her pain. She begins to embrace the brokenness of her body as a healing, energizing life force. Her vision is a wild and dangerous memory that brings her peace and self-acceptance.

It is essential that our religious ideas and images function to heal and empower us, rather than reinforce the dynamics of self-denial, self-hate, child abuse, and oppression. Through ideas and images that affirm the remembrance of ourselves we are led out of patriarchal theology. To heal ourselves and to liberate a suffering world, Christianity must find a healing image that leads us to dangerous, empowering memory and a theology grounded in such concrete memory.

CHRIST AS INCARNATE CHILD

For remembrance, I propose that we begin thinking of the Child as a divine image. In the image of the Child, we can see the grace born to

us as the gift of the divine image mirrored in our being. And even in the midst of our wounds and our capacity to hurt others, we can see all persons as carrying that divine image. For no matter what our age, our Child never leaves us. The image is inclusive and conveys the fragility and strength of love of self and others. In understanding the divine spirit as Child incarnate in us, we can see the need to remain connected to the original grace of our playful, feeling self and to seek that self in others as divine incarnation. Imaging deity as Child locates divine power not in control and authority but in vulnerability, joy, openness, and interdependence. The Child compels us to identify with victims, with those who suffer, rather than with the powerful.

If we use the Child as a heuristic tool to examine the Gospel texts, the obvious passages about becoming like a Child to enter the *basileia* leap out, as do the birth narratives. But I wish to turn to less obvious images in which the vulnerability and interdependence of adults reveal the divine presence. Those adult images begin in the activity of healing and exorcism, in which the divine presence is brought to awareness not, as the texts tend to claim, by the presence of God in Jesus, but through the appearance of woundedness and oppression. The possessed, sick, oppressed, imprisoned, lame, and outcast reveal the presence of the fragility of the Child in us all. The healings and exorcisms reveal the redemptive nature of relationships in which woundedness—vulnerability—is claimed. There, in the event, is the divine spirit, not in a single person, but in the connections, in interdependence. My examination of images will focus first on the story of the hemorrhaging woman and then on the passion narrative.

In healing, the function of the healer is not to gain power but to share it. In the sharing process, woundedness reveals the sacred. Between healer and sufferer, an inequality of power exists that denies the afflicted the capacity to become whole. Hence, the flow of power between healer and afflicted represents the balancing of power inequities and the emergence of wholeness. This flow takes on a strong social dimension in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation of the story of the hemorrhaging woman, a woman with a flow of blood.[16]

The story, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, represents a social reality still experienced by women. In her study of the origins of patriarchy, Gerda Lerner argues convincingly that the roots of male dominance are in the reification, possession, and control of female sexuality and reproduction. Women's reproductive capacities become support for

patriarchy, which uses subordination, rape, and murder to control women's sexual activity and usurps female birthing into male images of creation, ritual bleeding, and birthing. Lerner, along with O'Kelly and Carney, holds that systems of male dominance teach negative attitudes about women's bodies: their bleeding is polluting, their birthing is problematic, and their genitals are dirty.[17]

With these sexist attitudes toward women's bodies commonly acknowledged, the healing stories of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus's daughter demonstrate a vision of what life in the *basileia* could be for women, according to Schüssler Fiorenza. The healing of the woman with hemorrhages is placed between the beginning and end of the healing of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21–43). The reasons for the two females' ailments are not given. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that the juxtaposition of the two stories creates interlocking meanings. Both females were afflicted with crises associated with the status of women in Greco-Roman and Hebraic society. The adult woman was sick with one of the most polluting signs of female adulthood. The adolescent was on the threshold of a similar curse, puberty. The woman had suffered with a flow of blood for exactly the same period of time as it had taken Jairus's daughter to reach the official age of puberty and marriageability.

The woman's hemorrhage was the affliction of adult women in magnified form. She suffered from her very femaleness. The subjective perspective of the woman is unusually vivid in the narrative. Her hope is evident in the report of her thoughts. Her fear is depicted in her confession to her deed. Her faith and courage reestablish her wholeness. Her courage comes from knowing vulnerability and, despite her fear, reaching out for healing.

During the delay caused by the woman's cure, Jairus's daughter died. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, bleeding was death for women because it signified isolation from community. The emergence of womanhood for Jairus's daughter had fatal consequences, but the previous healing event hints at a reality already present. Jesus declared the child was only asleep. His function was to awaken her. Her adult female status was not denied but was affirmed as positive and active.

The context of the text points beyond personal illness to the social nature of the women's ailments. Behind the two women stand countless others who are encouraged to claim their femaleness. They are images of the removal of death and return to life of all women in the *basileia*.

The defiling element of womanhood is healed, according to Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation.

If we use Schüssler Fiorenza's contention that women represent, at least in some of the Gospel stories, the marginal in society, the stories of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus's daughter take on heuristic theological implications. The woman's flow of blood, her suffering, is the mark of her isolation, the absence of the flow of connectedness that we must have to be whole. She represents the brokenness of our human connections and her courage restores the flow of connectedness. As metaphors of exclusion, the women represent those who have been excluded or denied full participation in the church on the basis of factors over which authorities and experts have no power. Gender, race, sexual orientation, age, culture, language, and all other aspects of life that are part of the complex nature of selves are denied as reasons for exclusion and subordination.

This social aspect of the story can only make sense if the women are specifically understood in their femaleness under patriarchy. Without the specificity of gender and context, the stories' metaphorical qualities are lost. As a metaphor for exclusion, the wounded are called to action. In faith in their own worth, the wounded are called, despite fear of the consequences, to search until a source of healing opens itself, to refuse despair, and to act for wholeness. Thus the children who will become the next generation are given life.

The interlocking of the women's stories also make them images of one person. In acknowledging her own vulnerability, the woman was returned to wholeness. As a woman, she had sought a source to remove her isolation and restore her to wholeness. In doing so, she created the possibility for the child in her to come back to life. As a child in the sleeping girl, she is helped by someone who loves her and brings healing to her, but her own courage makes that act possible. In joining the two stories, the two aspects of one woman are returned into the wholeness of woman/child. Vulnerability reveals God.

This presence of vulnerability is brought to an important revealing moment in the passion narrative. In dying, Jesus becomes vulnerable, the image of the destroyed child. Immediately before his death, the twelve who would eventually desert Jesus are shown as still expecting a triumphant messiah. But Jesus did not defeat Rome with the armies of God. Instead he died in the hands of Rome. The shock of defeat of

messianic hopes seems to have been profound for those disciples who expected deliverance from an omnipotent God and a triumphant messiah. In identifying with those who symbolize such power, the fleeing disciples felt guilt and understood Jesus' death as deserved by everyone. They saw Jesus's death as a death for them, so that they might live.

However, some of the disciples understood how much they had misunderstood divine power and Jesus' mission. The harsh reality of his death shattered their expectations and cast his words and deeds in a different light. These disciples, women and men, made sure Jesus did not die abandoned and betrayed. They represented those who, through their participation in the Jesus movement, had experienced the liberating, empowering presence of love. The women at the resurrection also represented a caring, patient presence that could be wounded but not denied. Though frightened, they did not leave Jesus alone.

Divine presence as love, as connectedness, had come to the community through the wounded. Now, in the passion narrative, Jesus becomes the symbol of woundedness, such that the event of his death becomes a revelatory moment, pointing us toward vulnerability. In being bound with the vulnerable who accompany him to his death, Jesus is exposed as one among them, too wounded to suffer alone. In this alternative interpretation of the death and resurrection, gleaned from minor notes and undercurrents in the Gospel narratives, life surfaces through connection.

The centurion's confession at the end of Mark points to the incompleteness of the narrative. If Jesus' death was the end of the story, the illumination of divine presence is incomplete, for the relationships would be severed. They are not. The women return to his grave to claim him. When the stricken Jesus leaves them, they bring back his presence as a part of themselves, as a vision. The visionary-ecstatic images of the resurrection are expressed in various forms in the Gospels. In claiming life for themselves, the community transforms Jesus Christ into Christa/Community.

The resurrection of an abandoned Jesus is a meaningless event. The resurrection is given meaning by the witnesses who saw him die, marked his grave, and returned. These witnesses refused to let death and oppression defeat them; they remembered his presence to them; and they affirmed the divine presence among them. The persistent affirmation that oppressive powers would not have the last word, the refusal to give up on life, and the maintenance of healing presence give

meaning to the resurrection as a profound affirmation of *this* life, of the lives of those who live here and now and who cry out for healing and deliverance. The final circle of wholeness is provided by those women who, in their response to the death of Jesus, refuse to abandon him, stealing finality from defeat and disconnection. They understand their own fragility, but they refuse to give up on themselves and those they love. To understand the meaning of Christ, we must be willing to acknowledge the Child in ourselves and in each other and we must acknowledge our interdependence. In those moments of acknowledgment the tomb of death becomes a womb of life.

CONCLUSION

In the patriarchal family we find structures and practices that produce male dominance and sharp gender differences. The family even in its modern forms continues to transmit an orientation of control toward children. Children are seen as extensions of adult needs. In patriarchal systems self-acceptance and intimacy are difficult achievements. We find instead a legacy of dominated and abused children. That legacy transmits itself theologically in Christian doctrines and images that reflect our need for a perfect, good, omnipotent parent. To break free of and be healed of patterns of abuse, we must find the metaphors that lead us back to the Child, the vulnerable center of ourselves that carries our demons and wounds and that is the center of our power to connect.

To be speaking of weakness, vulnerability, and interdependence in the late twentieth century may seem like folly. The militaristic structures of patriarchy seem determined to rush our planet into a final all-encompassing death. What possible power can fragility, grace, gentleness, and vulnerability have to stop the machines of patriachy? Because we have believed in a divine being capable of such destructive power, we have made ourselves in that image. To continue to rely on such power will not see us out of our morass. To trust in the fragile Child, to challenge the powers of destruction with love, interdependence, care, and compassion, we must be courageous. But it is absolutely necessary—and a little Child will lead us.

NOTES

1. Charlotte B. O'Kelly and Larry S. Carney, *Women and Men in Society: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Gender Stratification*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.:

Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1988), esp. 90–91. See also Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), for a discussion of the complex factors that produce male dominance. Neither work asserts that all foraging societies are egalitarian, but that egalitarian societies occur more characteristically with foragers than in any other social organization.

2. See Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Childrearing and the Roots of Violence* and *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984). Miller discusses the similarity between religious ideas of God and images of parents created by abused children. Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, claims that benign paternalism develops out of patriarchal family relations and mitigates dominance by providing a sense of mutuality through the presence of reciprocal rights and obligations. "The dominated exchange submission for protection, unpaid labor for maintenance" (p. 239). For paternalism to function, the dominated must believe that their protectors are the only authorities capable of fulfilling their needs.

3. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), raises the question of the value of a different perspective represented by some women that differs from men. See also the summary of Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), in the following paragraph. Gilligan uses Chodorow's work in object-relations theory to support her thesis.

The issue of the role of biology in gender differences is not settled in feminist theory. While no feminist denies the importance of socialization in the production of gender difference, the extent to which gender identity is biologically grounded is still not clear. See Susan Basow, *Gender Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives* (Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1986), for a discussion of the research; and Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983) for a discussion of the theoretical implications of grounding gender difference metaphysically rather than culturally. Lerner (*Creation of Patriarchy*) and O'Kelly and Carney (*Women and Men in Society*) also discuss the question of the relationship between biology and culture.

4. For an extensive discussion of the impact of gender difference on views of power, see David McClelland, *Power: The Inner Experience* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1975). He describes the male view of power as both hierarchical and haunted by a tragic sense of the inevitability of failure.

5. I am not convinced that all gender difference is socially and historically constructed, but I believe extremely divergent forms of masculinity and femininity are not biologically grounded, based on evidence from crosscultural studies of gender difference. See Basow (*Gender Stereotypes*), Lerner (*Creation of Patriarchy*), and O'Kelly and Carney (*Women and Men in Society*). We can

free ourselves from rigid gender roles because even when biology is a factor in our lives, it interacts profoundly with environmental factors. Hence, to argue that biology might be a factor in gender-differentiated behavior does not mean such differences are rigidly fixed, or that differences along gender lines are greater than differences among members of one gender. Nor do biologically grounded differences mean such differences must be hierarchically valued.

6. For an extensive discussion of the separative self of androcentrism and the feminist view of life as connected, see Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

7. Miller, *For Your Own Good.*

8. This is not to say that all sexual differences are false, but that many socially constructed gender differences serve political purposes that support the power structures of patriarchy. These differences are part of a socialization process that denies individual persons access to essential parts of themselves.

9. Harriet Goldhor Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Pattern of Intimate Relationships* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

10. Miller, *For Your Own Good*, xi.

11. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973). See also Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); and idem, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

12. Quoted by Barbara Deming in *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*, ed. Jane Meyerding (New Haven: New Society Publishers, 1984).

13. Alice Miller's work has led me to this conclusion, which I presented in a paper at the 1985 national meeting of the American Academy of Religion. The presence of religious ideas that support child abuse is most clearly articulated by Miller in a section on Job in *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware.*

14. Consciousness-raising was one of the trademarks of the wave of feminism that marks its beginning with Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973).

15. Nelle Morton, "The Goddess as Metaphoric Image," in *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 147–75.

16. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

17. Ibid.