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## Redemption or Abuse? Toward a Feminist Interpretation of Atonement by Alison Walker

In the summer of 1992, the Christian feminist magazine *Daughters of Sarah* published an article by ordained United Methodist minister Joanne Carlson Brown. Cognizant of the controversial and provocative nature of Brown's article, the editorial committee of *Daughters of Sarah* followed it with five separate responses and also prefaced it with a reminder that "sometimes [Christian feminist] dialogue is neither easy nor pleasant" (Sandhaas 1992). The dialogue continued in subsequent issues of the magazine as a number of readers replied to Brown's ideas ("Dear Daughters" 1992 and 1993; "Responses to Summer Symposium" 1993). What was it that Brown wrote that prompted so much discussion?

Entitling her article "Divine Child Abuse?" Brown declared, "I believe Christianity has been a—sometimes *the*—primary force in shaping our acceptance of abuse (1992, 24; emphasis in original). She specifically identified the doctrine of atonement as glorifying the victimization of women and children in our society, concluding that "if Christianity is to be liberating for the oppressed, it must itself be liberated from this [abusive] theology" of atonement (1992, 28).

As a Christian and a feminist, I was struck by Brown's declarations. Didn't I believe, as Bruce R. McConkie wrote in *Mormon Doctrine*, that "the doctrine of the atonement embraces, sustains, supports, and gives life and force to all other gospel doctrines; [that] it is the foundation upon which all truth rests... [that] indeed, the atonement *is* the gospel [of Jesus Christ]" (1979, 60; emphasis mine)? And yet my feminist sensibilities and my awareness of the very real problem of abuse in our society told me that much of what Brown said was true: women "have been convinced that our suffering is justified" (1992, 24; emphasis mine). My attempts to integrate these two ideas led to the creation of this paper.

### The Prevalence of Abuse

"The [American Medical Association] now estimates that up to four million women are severely assaulted by boyfriends and husbands each year, and about one in four women is likely to be [physically] abused by a partner in her lifetime" (Glazer 1993, A13). "Nearly one child... in every twenty-two... is [currently] a victim of physical abuse from another family member" (Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 422). And an estimated 30 percent of girls are sexually abused before the age of 18, most often by a family

member (Berger 1991, 486-497; Engel 1989, xv, 21, 25-26; Murdock 1993, 63), as are a "lower but still staggering" number of boys (Kocherhans 1993, 203-204). More subtle forms of family violence—verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse—are also commonplace, and abusers truly "can do as much battery psychologically as physically" (Seligmann 1992, 90; see also Anderson and Blanchard 1993, 87-88 and Horton and Marquez 1993, 158-165).

Domestic violence permeates our society.

What are the reasons for this deplorable situation among our families? Historically, women

and children have been considered to be the property of men, thereby justifying men's abuse of women and children by rights of ownership (Bohn 1989; Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 422; Matlin 1987, 444). Adding to the historical precedent for family violence are the impact of traditional masculine and feminine socialization (Martin 1976, 64-66; Matlin 1987, 424; Radl 1983, 74) and the stress of traditional male and female role expectations (Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 423; Paxman 1993, 6-7; Radl 1983, 79). Further, domestic abuse arises from our society's system of male dominance (Matlin 1987, 448)—both actual dominance, economic and otherwise (Lamanna and Riedmann, 1991, 341; Walker 51-52, 127-144), and desired dominance, whereby abuse is used as a "resource" to achieve or maintain dominance (Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 340; Martin 1976, 54). The Doctrine & Covenants warns us that power corrupts,<sup>1</sup> and many men use abusive means to get and keep power.

The causes of domestic abuse are admittedly diverse and complex, and yet all, I believe, are rooted in the patriarchal system in which we live. In other words, violence against women and children<sup>2</sup> is but one of many devastating consequences of patriarchy.<sup>3</sup>

### The Relationship of Christianity and Abuse

Despite a professed belief in Christ and his teachings, family violence pervades the communities of so-called Christians—including Mormons—just as it does our society as a whole (Horton et al. 1993, xi; Kanoza 1993, 33).<sup>4</sup> The fact is that patriarchy is perhaps nowhere in our society so firmly entrenched as in the male-dominated religions. Certainly a view of Eve as a secondary creation and the source of evil in the world does nothing to promote the status of women (Clarke 1989; Phillips 1984;



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Rockwood 1987). Neither does a belief in God as Father, for as feminist theologian Mary Daly stated, "As long as God is male, the male is God" (1973, 19).

Swiss psychotherapist Alice Miller argues that much of the child abuse in our society is justified by the Judeo-Christian commandment "honor thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12) and such canonized maxims as "spare the rod and spoil the child" (Proverbs 13:24)<sup>5</sup> (1983 and 1984). Similarly, Paul's admonition that "wives [are to] submit unto [their] husbands" (Ephesians 5:22) is used to justify violence toward women (Kanoza 1993, 35).<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, the leaders of various Christian denominations have recently begun to address the widespread problem of domestic violence. The United Church of Christ, for example, issued a statement on domestic violence in 1983, pronouncing that "as Christians, believing in the sacredness of God's creation and the equality of women and men, we are called to speak out against the physical and/or sexual abuse of any person" (Bohn 1989, 112-113). In 1992, this country's Roman Catholic bishops issued their first official statement on spouse abuse, ruling that women are not bound by the Bible to submit to abusive husbands or to remain in abusive relationships (Associated Press 1992).

Within the Mormon community, too, domestic abuse is being denounced. I commend the efforts of Church leaders to confront the problem of abuse in LDS families by addressing it in such official forums as general conference, *The Ensign* magazine, and correlated lesson materials.<sup>7</sup> I view each condemnation of family violence within Mormonism as a positive sign, an indication that the silence upon which domestic abuse depends upon for its survival is to some degree being broken within and through authorized Church channels.<sup>8</sup> Still, I am certain that not enough is being done within the Church—or within other groups of Christians—to address the enormity of the existent problem. To quote Carole R. Bohn, a Boston University professor of pastoral psychology:

While [the pronouncements of Christian leaders] call their churches to some sort of action [against abuse], they do not challenge their institutions' historic stance toward and complicity with the problem. They are pragmatic attempts to confront the problem of domestic violence; yet they are primarily band-aids designed to alleviate a symptom. [1989, 113]

As long as the structure and culture of the Mormon Church remains essentially patriarchal in nature, attitude, and practice, family violence will continue to be a problem within LDS communities, as it will be within other patriarchal Christian churches.

Nevertheless, I do believe that existing within Christianity is the essential power for the healing of abuse. That power is the atonement of Jesus Christ. As I explained that the beginning of this paper, however, Joanne Carlson Brown claims that the Christian concept of atonement actually sanctions suffering and abuse. This possibility *must* be addressed.

### Traditional Theories of the Atonement

To begin my examination of atonement, I will look at three theories of Jesus' atonement within traditional Christian thought,<sup>9</sup> and at the same time try to ascertain what model of atonement is espoused by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Sterling McMurrin, in his book *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, asserts that "Mormonism reflects in its doctrine of the atonement the eclecticism that might be expected in a theology that is at once the inheritor of traditional views and a participant in the reaction against them" (1965, 88-89). Let us look at those traditional views.

#### The "Satisfaction" Theory

Widely accepted by both Catholics and Protestants (as well as, I believe, by Mormons) is the "satisfaction" theory of the atonement.<sup>10</sup> This concept can be found in Christian history since the early Fathers, with a consistent model of the theory first developed by St. Anselm in the early twelfth century. Under this theory, the death of Jesus was required to "pay the price of sin" (Alexander 1985), satisfying "the demands imposed by God's ... nature... as absolute justice and absolute mercy" (McMurrin 1965, 86). The theory emphasizes Christ's death as more significant than either his life and ministry or his resurrection, and, indeed, for most of Christianity the cross is the central symbol of the belief system.

Scriptural support for the satisfaction theory includes Paul's references to Christ's death "for" us (Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11, 15:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Thess. 5:10) and the epistles of John, in which Jesus is described as "the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2, 4:10). In the Book of Mormon, we can also find "the main ingredients of Anselm's satisfaction theory" (McMurrin 1965, 90; see Alma 42:14-15). Now, how might the

satisfaction theory of atonement promote family violence?

- **Promoting self-sacrifice.** As Brown explains,

The imitator of Christ, which every faithful person is exhorted to be, can find herself choosing to endure suffering because she has become convinced that through her pain another whom she loves will escape pain. The disciple's role is to suffer in the place of others, as Jesus suffered for us all. [1989, 8]

"Many victims [of domestic violence] have been counseled by their ministers to sacrifice themselves for their families<sup>11</sup> and take up their cross of suffering<sup>12</sup> as Jesus did" (1988, 15; see also Martin 1976, 2 and Wiley 1992, 33). Mary Grey, a professor of feminism and Christianity in The Netherlands, argues that "women have so absorbed [this] ethic of self-sacrifice... that they assume... their rightful place is ... on the cross with Jesus!" (1990, 16).

- **Encouraging passivity.** Christian feminist Reta Halteman Finger identifies a second defect of the satisfaction theory: it "encourages passivity in the believer. If Jesus did all the work of salvation, what is there to do but sit back and accept it?" (1988, 15). Though I reject a gospel of works, or the idea of self-salvation, in favor of a gospel of grace,<sup>13</sup> I am still convinced that "God gave unto [woman and] man that [they] should act for [themselves]" (2 Nephi 2:16) and "not... be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:26). As Mormon feminist Lavina Fielding Anderson asserts:

I see nothing in the New Testament to indicate that Jesus expects children—or adults either—to be passive. He was on the move constantly—striding along the roads, responding to a call for help, checking the sycamore trees for undersized tax collectors<sup>14</sup>—and it seems pretty clear to me that the people who benefited from his teachings were those who kept close to him by moving, even if they had to do some leg-stretching and panting. [1992, 102–103]

And yet women are frequently "guilty of failing to take responsibility [for themselves], of allowing others to act on them and for them" (Grey 1990, 22). For victims of abuse in particular, an atonement doctrine encouraging passivity leads to an *acceptance* of their circumstances rather than an *activism* that could change those circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

- **Ignoring systemic evil.** A third inadequacy of this theory is its emphasis on paying the price for sin; that is, through this theory, no sources of evil, no causes of suffering other than personal sin are redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This omission is significant, however, because as Neal Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve has pointed out (and as victims of family violence well know), "not all human sorrow and pain is connected to [personal] sin" (1988, 51).

Expressing tremendous pain, one woman says:

Paul writes of an individual's own sin causing estrangement from God. He writes, too, of Christ's grace... restoring that individual's loving relationship with God. But what if *another's* sin causes our alienation from God? ... How can grace enter our lives then? [Keene 1990, 10]

Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether identifies a third source of pain and suffering in the world when she discusses "systemic social evil, which conditions our personal choices before we choose and prevents us from fully understanding our own choices and actions" (1983, 181–182). For example, in my earlier identification of the patriarchal system as the underpinning of family violence, I describe an evil, to paraphrase Ruether, for

which no abuser *as an individual* can or is expected to carry the total burden of guilt.<sup>16</sup> There is not only the impact of centuries of patriarchal thought, but also, for example, the reality that "a man who sexually abuses a child [generally] was himself abused" (Daniels and Scott 1992, 112; see also Kocherhans 1993). Former Mormon bishop Robert Rees has explained,

As I have counseled with hundreds of Church members over the past five years[,] I have come to recognize that there is an entire category of people who have been physically, psychologically, and sexually abused and who because of this often have an impaired sense of moral reasoning or an impaired ability to live certain commandments. [1992, 23]

The high percentages of prostitutes, female drug addicts, and those with eating disorders with a history of sexual abuse as children illustrate well Rees' point (Daniels and Scott 1992, 187; Harby 1993, 4; Miller 1984, 326).<sup>17</sup> For both victim and perpetrator, the issue of systemic evil is critical to the healing process. A theory of atonement that does not address systemic evil is not adequately redemptive.

In three separate ways, then, the satisfaction model is a deficient one, particularly for the redemption of those who suffer from domestic violence. For these and perhaps other reasons, many have found the satisfaction model to be "morally and spiritually repugnant" (Hick 1988, 37) and have embraced instead the "moral influence" theory of atonement.<sup>18</sup>

### The "Moral Influence" Theory

According to this doctrine, "the barrier to our redemption... is not in God's nature (as in the satisfaction theory) but in human nature." Jesus' death is viewed as "a divine demonstration" of God's love and mercy, and looking at Jesus "can move us to accept [him] and dedicate ourselves to obedience to God's will" (Brown 1992, 26–27). The emphasis of the theory is on Jesus' life, "so committed to God that he persevered unto death. In doing so, Jesus becomes our example of how we need to live" (Finger 1988, 15).

Developed in the twelfth century by French theologian Pierre Abelard, the moral influence theory gained adherents in the 19th century when its emphasis on "the ethical and moral dimensions of Jesus' life" was deemed "more compatible with the new scientific world than the [satisfaction] view of salvation" (Finger 1988, 15). Advocates of the theory observe that while "expiation" words appear only eight times in the New Testament, words from the stem of love (*agape*) appear over 250 times (Finger 1988, 16).

Mormon support for the moral influence theory comes, I think, as we sing "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me" (Gabriel 1985). BYU professor Eugene England cites evidence of the moral influence theory of the atonement as critical to his coming to "*know* Christ as [his] Savior." Serving as a missionary in Hawaii, England taught a man who was struggling to repent in order to be baptized as his wife had been previously.

Slowly, and then with dramatic suddenness, we all came to feel as well as understand how completely Christ loved and accepted [this man], even in his present condition. And just as suddenly, when he was able to accept that love, to feel at one with his Savior, we saw a literal power surge into him and make repentance possible. He seemed to say to himself, "If Christ, who I have offended, and my saintly wife, who I have sinned against, can have this kind of love for me, who am I to withhold it from myself?" And with that he became, overnight, a new person, was dramatically born again as a new creature in Christ, with no more desire to do evil, and was

able to be baptized as a witness of the new life. [1986, 31–32] Also reflecting this theory, Richard Clarke of the Presidency of the Seventy recently declared,

The incomprehensible severity of [Jesus'] suffering should convince us that we are loved and very important to our Heavenly Father.... To express our love and gratitude for the Atonement, we covenant with our Heavenly Father to take upon us the name of His Son and to bear witness of Him at all times and in all places, observing His commandments. [1993, 10]

The moral influence theory's emphasis on Christ's life is considerably more uplifting than the satisfaction theory's focus on His death. I love the Mormon sacrament hymn that states,

*As now we take the sacrament,  
Our thoughts are turned to thee,  
Thou Son of God, who lived for us,  
Then died on Calvary.* [Perry 1985; emphasis mine]

The world into which Jesus was born was governed by the misogynist cultures of the Jews and the Greeks.<sup>19</sup> And yet the life and ministry of Jesus joyously repudiated the patriarchal system of his world. Whether or not Jesus can accurately be labeled a "feminist,"<sup>20</sup> women and children were undeniably valued and validated—never abused—in his life and teachings.

I see the moral influence theory as preferable to the satisfaction theory also because love is a more powerful motivator than punishment. "Women [—and men—] who have developed a fear and hatred of a stern, wrathful God are deeply in need of [the moral influence theory's] message of love and acceptance." Particularly for those who have been abused, "the inclusive, grace-filled love of Jesus, with his treatment of women as full human beings can be Good News indeed" (Finger 1988, 16; see also Gardiner 1993, 171–172, 174–177 and Peck 1978, 187–191). Christian writer Stormie Omartian explains:

There are people who have gone through the hell of being abused... and are already painfully aware of their imperfections. These victims of abuse don't need to hear that they must be perfect. They need to know that God *already* views them as perfect when [God] looks into their heart[s] and sees Jesus there. [1989, 60]

The moral influence theory certainly is an improvement over the satisfaction theory. And yet this theory can still glorify suffering.

• **Exalting victims.** Joanne Carlson Brown asserts that "the moral influence theory is founded on the belief that an innocent, suffering victim... has the power to confront us with our guilt and move us to a new decision," and thereby the theory has "subtle and terrifying connections as to how victims of violence can be viewed" (Brown 1992, 27), both by abusers and by victims themselves. I believe this exalting of victims constitutes the basis of "the three-phase cycle of [domestic] violence": first, there is a tension-building phase with minor battering incidents. The tension then escalates resulting in an acute battering incident in the second phase. "In phase three, the tension from the first two phases [is] gone, and the batterer becomes charming and loving. He apologizes and promises that he will never be violent again. He begs for forgiveness... [and] consistent[ly]... the woman... feels needed, hopeful about the future, and guilty about any inclination to leave the batterer." "The cycle [then] repeats itself, with the violence worsening, if nothing is done to change things" (Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 339; Matlin 1987, 442–443).

• **Promoting self-sacrifice.** Since the moral influence theory emphasizes following in Jesus' footsteps, like the satisfaction model it can encourage women to endlessly suffer in the name of love. Even in its most benign form, this doctrine of atonement encourages the self-sacrifice of mothers who are last to get a new dress and first to receive the burnt toast. BYU professor Sharon Lee Swenson argues that this is

a trap that... Mormon women are particularly susceptible to. Sometimes we [think] that the gospel tells us to sacrifice the self—that attention to the self is *selfish*. Well, we all know that isn't so. You can't have a healthy family if you don't have healthy individuals—individuals with a strong sense of self—in that family. But you have to be sure that *everyone* in the family has it—including you.<sup>21</sup> [1992, 246]

• **Ignoring systemic evil.** In addition, the moral influence theory, like the satisfaction theory, is deficient in that it does not adequately recognize the presence of evil in the world. Reta Finger asks: "Will a benign and loving influence help civilization gradually work its way out of a patriarchal worldview and sexist, racist, classist behavior? Or do we need more drastic surgery?" (Finger 1988, 16). In other words, love cannot conquer all.

### The "Christus Victor" Tradition

A third atonement doctrine is the "Christus Victor" tradition (Brown 1992 and 1989; Finger 1988),<sup>22</sup> which was influential for the first thousand years after Christ. This theory "sees the death of Jesus as a mortal confrontation with the powers of evil that oppress human life" (Brown 1992, 26), thereby liberating humans from the bondage imposed by evil powers working in the world. The focus of the Christus Victor tradition includes Christ's "entire incarnation, life, death, and resurrection as one continuing conflict with the powers of evil" (Finger 1988, 16).

Of the three traditional theories of atonement, the Christus Victor model seems to be the most redemptive because "it exposes the systemic evils of oppression, patriarchy, militarism, materialism" and so forth, while in no way minimizing individual sinfulness (1988, 18). As I have discussed, neither the satisfaction theory nor the moral influence theory adequately addresses the existence of systemic sin. Yet systemic evil does exist, and for redemption to occur, especially for victims of abuse, Christ's atonement must address the "social nature of sin" (Finger 1990, 12). Through the Christus Victor tradition, we see that it does. As Bruce Hafen convincingly argues in his book *The Broken Heart*: "The atonement is not just for sinners" (1989, 1). Gene R. Cook of the Seventy recently concurred: "The Lord, through His grace, can continually assist us in our daily lives... in our physical and mental sickness, pain, transgressions, and even in all our infirmities" (1993, 80).

Jesus expressed this idea himself with the parable of the lost coin. "What woman," he asked, "having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" (Luke 15:8). "The lostness described [in this parable] is a different kind from the lost son or the lost sheep [of the two other parables of Luke 15]. The coin didn't wander off; there was nothing willful about its separation from the Housewife. Through no fault of its own, it is isolated in a dark corner" (Pratt 1992, 16). But, as the Christus Victor tradition illustrates, Jesus seeks for lost coins as well as lost sheep and lost sons. "In a hundred ways, Deity will always be there... in our suffering[,]" whatever its source (Maxwell 1987, 32).

The Christus Victor model answers, too, the dilemma of the faithful believer who wishes to imitate Christ. He *did* say, "For I have

given you an example” (John 13:15), but we have seen how the satisfaction and moral influence theories provide an example not worthy of emulation—the example of a victim. In the Christus Victor tradition, however, we note that “human salvation is... effected by putting one’s trust in and identifying with [the] *victorious* Christ” (Finger 1988, 17; emphasis mine). To imitate Christ, one is *not* required to be a victim. Religious counselor Christin Lore Weber offers this insight:

Jesus transcended victimhood by confronting victimization but not acquiescing to it. He died but only seemed to be conquered. He never lost his integrity; he never submitted to what was less than God. He held to his vision both of himself and of God.... The crucifixion contains a wonderful paradox for those who can see through the surface to the meaning of this event. The one who seems to be the victim—Jesus—is not the victim at all... he lives and reigns. Those who do the killing are the victims of this event. [Weber 1987, 100]

• **Advocating endurance to the end.** Despite the redeeming aspects of the Christus Victor model, however, a belief in this theory can still prompt the acceptance of abuse by “encourag[ing] people to *endure* [their] suffering as a prelude to a new life” (Brown 1992, 26; emphasis mine). Indeed, for St. Irenaeus, a second-century theologian influential in the formation of the doctrine, “the final achievement of freedom and perfection [would] come in the next world [with a corresponding] undervaluing of [the] here-and-now” (Grey 1990, 26). Victory for the battered wife and the abused child is thus long in coming, and meanwhile suffering continues as they patiently endure.<sup>23</sup> Like Celie in *The Color Purple*, the abuse victim may say: “Well, sometime Mr. \_\_\_\_ git on me pretty hard.... But he my husband.... This life soon be over... Heaven last all ways.” [Celie’s daughter-in-law Sofia responds:] “You ought to bash Mr. \_\_\_\_ head open... Think bout heaven later” (Walker 1982, 47). While I am certainly not advocating returning violence with violence, I do believe, as Sofia does, that it is important that the needs of abuse victims be met in the here-and-now, not by some reward in heaven.

### Toward a Feminist Interpretation of Atonement

Because of the deficiencies of the traditional views of atonement, particularly in light of the pervasive problem of domestic violence, Joanne Carlson Brown and others<sup>24</sup> seek to “liberate” Christianity from this “abusive theology” (1992, 28). I believe, however, that the oppressive, non-redemptive aspects of the traditional atonement doctrines are not inherent in the concept of atonement nor in the being who was and is Jesus Christ. Rather, the oppression and abuse are a reflection of the patriarchal culture in which those theories were developed—a culture that has oppressed women for millennia. I therefore propose, not a rejection of atonement, but a feminist *interpretation* of atonement.<sup>25</sup> How could atonement be interpreted to uplift, liberate, and give life, instead of degrade, capture, and kill it? Further, could we interpret the atonement in a way that would create good, not just remedy evil, and that would foster caring, equal relationships, not just heal domestic abuse after the fact? Building on the positive aspects of the moral influence and Christus Victor theories, let me share a few thoughts as I look toward a feminist interpretation of atonement.

### The Significance of Women’s Experience

I have argued in the past that women are more similar than different, that stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity are not innate, and that our shared humanity rather than our gender-

based differences should be emphasized (Walker 1990). I will continue to argue these ideas. More recently, I have also become convinced through my reading of psychotherapist Anne Wilson Schaeff (1985), developmentalist Carol Gilligan (1982), and others, that frequently “each sex experiences and comprehends the world” in different ways (Flake 1991, 16). This is not simply because women are the bearers, and in our social construct, the primary rearers of children, though I believe that plays a part. More significant, in my opinion, is the fact that we live in what Schaeff has called “the White Male System... and in it, the power and influence are held by white males” (1985, 2). Further, as Carol Tavris explains in her book *The Mismeasure of Woman*, “in almost every domain of life, men are considered the normal human being, and women are ‘abnormal’” (1992, 17). Tavris describes how this male-as-standard affects our understanding and interpretation of art, law, history, intimacy, medicine, psychology, talk, work—and even the phenomenon of abuse. I believe man-as-norm also affects the way we view the atonement of Jesus Christ: our present interpretations of atonement are very much “male” interpretations. We need an interpretation that incorporates women’s experience as well as men’s, and that views women, as well as men, as redeemable. “A full theology of redemption cannot stop with one sex alone” (Grey 1990, 10). To set up the standards of the patriarchal system as normative as we try to explain how the atonement works in the lives of women renders the theology not merely “irrelevant” (Saiving 1979, 41), but also destructive, as it perpetuates and even glorifies abuse and suffering.

In an article on feminist Christology, Rebecca D. Pentz examined Jesus’ interaction with the women in his life.<sup>26</sup> From her analysis Pentz concluded that Jesus treated men and women in different ways, corresponding to the different ways they experienced and comprehended the world (1988, 83–86). Jesus was always willing to meet people at their level, and I think the power of his atonement, too, must meet us—women *and* men—within our realm of experience. Incorporating the experience of both men and women, then, what are some important concepts toward a feminist interpretation of atonement?

### The Meaning of Justice

In discussing the implications of the moral influence theory, I explained my belief that love is a more powerful motivator than fear of punishment. In the Book of Mormon, however, Alma taught his son Corianton that “mercy cannot rob justice” (Alma 42:25). So what of this notion of justice? One evening, I heard a friend of mine—a woman, apparently somewhat frustrated—exclaim to another friend—a man—“But justice is such a *male* concept!”<sup>27</sup> I am not certain what she meant—and neither was she when I asked her—but as I have contemplated her statement in recent weeks, I have become convinced that what Perry Mason means when he asks for the judge to indulge him “in the interest of justice” is very different from what Alice Walker meant when she wrote, “Only Justice Can Stop a Curse” (1984).

In their book *Strangers in Paradox*, Margaret and Paul Toscano have written, “The tension between God’s mercy and judgment is but [one] of the paradoxes of Christianity... When we see judgment not as punishment but as God working to redeem us... the tensions of the paradox begin to relax” (1990, 140). For me to believe in “God working to redeem us,” I must reject the widely accepted idea, inherent in Anselm’s satisfaction model, “that justice is established through adequate punishment” (Brown 1989, 8). Instead, I view justice as the process of casting out wrongfulness and creating rightness.

To explain my conception of justice requires first a look at the notion of obedience. As a child I learned to sing in Primary:

*When my father calls me,  
Quickly I'll obey,  
For father knows just what is best,  
Each and ev'ry day.* [Harrison 1980]<sup>28</sup>

Obedience is, of course, highly valued within Christianity, with Jesus' obedience to the will of his Father the supreme example.<sup>29</sup> Still, I will argue with Rabbi Harold Kushner that "obedience is not necessarily the highest virtue" (1986, 127). The reluctant messiah of Richard Bach's *Illusions* taught that "there is no good and there is no evil, outside of what makes us happy and what makes us unhappy" (1977, 169). While this statement might be dismissed as the mumblings of a hedonist, I think Bach's messiah is instead expressing an important truth: what God expects of us is not our obedience but our happiness.<sup>30</sup> John Drane, author of *Jesus and the Four Gospels*, argues that what Jesus taught, in fact,

was never intended to be a 'law' in any sense at all. Most laws are based on calculations of how the majority of people can reasonably be expected to behave. A law that cannot be kept is a bad law, and it is no use making a law to put pressure on men and women to become what they are not. But this, of course, is essentially what Jesus' teaching does: it asks us to be different from what we would naturally be. For [Jesus] the secret of goodness was to be found not in *obedience to rules*, but in the spontaneous activities of *a transformed character*. [1979, 133–134; emphasis mine]

For victims of abuse, an emphasis on happiness instead of on obedience becomes vital. As one adult child of abuse warns: "Children should *never* be taught simply to 'respect authority'" ("What Survivors of Abuse Want Others To Know" 1993, 72; see also Redmond 1989, 78–79).

If what God asks is not our obedience but our happiness, then by corollary, I think, the justice God seeks is not punishment for disobedience, but a casting out of wrongfulness and a creation of rightness. To utilize some scriptural passages, "a mighty change wrought in [the] heart" (Alma 5:12) and a "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4) is the justice Jesus requires of his disciples. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) illustrates well Jesus' desire for change instead of punishment. As theologian John Hick explains it:

When [the] erring son repents and returns home, the father does not say, "Because I am a just father I cannot forgive you until I have killed my other son to atone to me for your sins." [He does not even demand, as a just father, that the prodigal son himself receive the appointed punishment. Rather] he calls for the best robe and has a great feast prepared.... Indeed, forgiveness that has to be bought by full payment of the debt is not forgiveness. [Some present] the picture of a God who does not forgive but whose pardon is bought when some person—guilty or innocent—receives the appointed punishment. Jesus presented the picture of a God who performs the miracle of forgiveness. [Hick 1988, 10, 37]

The prodigal son had already suffered the error of his ways; what he needed was to be reconciled to his father. Likewise, the battered woman and the abused child have already suffered the trauma of their situations; what they need now is healing, not guilt or blame. When justice is defined in terms of receiving one's "just desserts," however, victims of abuse can all too readily see themselves as deserving that abuse. The reality is that "probably 99.9 percent of

abuse victims [*do*] blame themselves for their trauma" (Yorgason and Oaks 1992, 345). Society does too, assuming that battered women are masochists or that they "asked for it" (Grey 1990, 153–154; Matlin 1987, 446) and that abused children are in need of the "discipline" they receive, even that "there is no such thing as a true victim [of sexual abuse]" (Engel 1989, 31–35; Miller 1990, 160; Radl 1983, 71–73). Unfortunately, any "explanation" for abuse "leaves no room for questioning [the] suffering [of the victim] or for confronting [the] abuser with his responsibility for it" (Fortune 1989, 140).<sup>31</sup> A view of justice as adequate punishment does not foster healing for victims of abuse.<sup>32</sup> Even for the abuser—as for other sinners—a process of casting out wrongfulness and creating rightness is more beneficial than a call for punishment. As Erin Silva explained in an article in *Dialogue*,

The primary function of any ecclesiastical action should be to comfort and love the sinner, to persuade those who have sinned to repent and lay their burden at the feet of Christ and "go and sin no more" [John 8:11]. The sinner's self-esteem should be rebuilt, and the wounds of sin dressed. Encouragement, compassion, and mercy will enable healing to begin. [1992, 82]

In my view, then, what Christ did was not suffer *for* our sins—that is, take upon himself our punishment. Rather, through his acts of atonement,<sup>33</sup> he provides the means by which, in some mystical way, wrongfulness can be cast out and rightness created. Through him, sins—personal *and* systemic—are erased; sorrows are healed; brokenness is mended. His justice can stop a curse.

### The Concept of Mutuality

This view of justice leads me to a second concept toward a feminist interpretation of atonement: the idea of mutuality. Quoting Eugene England:

We pronounce the word "atonement" in a way that encourages a misleading emphasis on payment. The word actually descends from the 13th-century phrase *at one*... meaning to make one or to reconcile.... It was only later that the meaning focused to atonement as payment, when the new verb *atone* developed out of this concept but with a meaning that expressed the growing emphasis of... English theologians on Christ's payment. [1986, 33]

Mary Grey, in her search for atonement from a feminist perspective, agrees that *atonement* "must be re-imagined as *at-one-ment*, as a fundamental drive to unity and wholeness.... *At-one-ment* is a metaphor which [simultaneously] evokes the goal of mutuality and the process of achieving it" (1990, 160).

Drawing upon the words of Alma in Mosiah 18, BYU sociology professor Marie Cornwall maintains that "when we enter into the fold of God, we covenant both with God... and also with the community... We are promising God not only to keep [Their] commandments but to comfort and to mourn with and witness to others" (Cornwall 1993, 179; see Mos. 18:8–10). No victim of abuse—indeed no one who suffers—should ever have to "go it alone." And yet many, even most do. One Christian woman laments, "How can we begin Christ's healing process when our own brothers and sisters don't acknowledge the wounds?" (Branagh 1993, 62). Those who do "try to break out of their isolation... are often discredited and shamed" (Bohn 1989, 111; see also Grey 1990, 153). Such treatment is contemptible, particularly when it comes from those who profess to love God, because "God... heals and redeems by enabling *us* to claim power in relationship" (Grey 1990, 119; emphasis mine)—our individual relationships with God, our

relationships with each other, and our relationships with ourselves.<sup>34</sup> “Redemption [comes as we] take responsibility for all the forms of relationality in which we are involved, ... building right relation here and now” with God as the “source of relational power” (Grey 1990, 112, 111).<sup>35</sup> Utilizing this power, each of us can further Jesus’ work of at-one-ment. “We do [at-one-ment] work when we marry and work at that marriage.... As [we] nurture children... [we] do this work. As [we] draw others to the love of the Savior, [we] live at-one-ment” (Thomas 1993, 89–91).

Importantly, for the existence of mutuality, we must value *self* as much as we value others. Pride has frequently been identified as “the universal sin” (Benson 1989, 6). Yet I will argue that pride or selfishness is the universal *male* sin, while the universal *female* sin is self-negation (Finger 1990, 13; Grey 1990, 22; Ruether 1983, 185–186; Saiving 1979). Traditional atonement theology espousing self-sacrifice and submission may address the male sin, but it fails to address the female sin—and can even exacerbate it by justifying women’s suffering and abuse. On the other hand, a theology of atonement that emphasizes mutuality can address this difference between women’s and men’s experience, as *all* people learn to ask for what they need from others *and* to serve others (Hammond 1990, 19).

Chieko Okazaki, counselor in the General Relief Society Presidency, has spoken about “our patterns of interconnectedness” (1993, 84). This sense of connection is a strength of women, traditionally concerned with the needs of others. For mutuality and at-one-ment, women need to balance love of others with love of self, for a “sense of selfhood... is a prerequisite for any experience of redemption” (Grey 1990, 75). For the battered woman, who commonly has “a confused sense of identity,” indeed, for *all* women “taught to find their identity first from association with fathers, then from husbands” (Bohn 1989, 110), the development and love of self is crucial. One woman states her conviction that “the sin that threatens to stand between me and the full healing benefits of God’s love is to believe that I am unlovable” (Snow 1990, 21). By combining love of self and love of others, an atonement doctrine of mutuality can both heal broken relationships and also prevent the mistreatment of some people by others by setting mutuality as the standard for Christian life, replacing the traditional doctrines that have proven so destructive.

### The Process of Transformation

A third concept toward a feminist interpretation of atonement is evident in the following quotation from Marie Fortune in an article she wrote about suffering:

Transformation is the alternative to endurance and passivity. It is grounded in the conviction of hope and empowered by a passion for justice... It is the faith that the way things are is not the way things have to be.... Transformation is the means by which, refusing to accept injustice and refusing to assist its victims to endure suffering any longer, people act. We celebrate small victories, we chip away at oppressive attitudes set in concrete, we say no in unexpected places, we speak boldly of things deemed secret and unmentionable, we stand with those who are trapped in victimization to support their journey to safety and healing, and we break the cycle of violence we may have known in our own lives. By refusing to endure evil and by seeking to transform suffering, we are about God’s work of making justice and healing brokenness. [1989, 146–147]

Bringing together the ideas of justice and mutuality, Fortune

describes the pathway of at-one-ment: it is through transformation of suffering, whatever its source, that redemption becomes possible.

Inherent in this concept of atonement as transformation is an emphasis of the eternal principle of agency. As I have explained, the socialization of women frequently teaches them passivity and self-denial, and traditional theories of atonement support women in this task. Yet the teachings of Jesus offer another possibility. One woman described the comfort and strength she received when, through her study of the scriptures, “I discovered Jesus to be the most direct [and] honest... person I had met... How clear are those brief words from the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Ask and it will be given to you’ (Matthew 7:7)” (Trapp 1992, 46). Learning to assert their needs is an important task for all women, and even more so for victims of abuse. “Probably the most devastating wound left by abuse is the loss of personal freedom. Victims [have been] forced to give up their agency to their abusers. Accustomed to this, they remain... victim[s] until they discover that their freedom has to be reclaimed” (Yorgason and Oaks 1992, 352). For Jesus’ transforming power to be present in any of our lives, we must claim our agency and *invite* him to be with us. As Chieko Okazaki stated,

if one great constant in the universe is the unfailing love of the Savior, the other great constant in his unfailing respect for human agency. He will not override your will, even for your own good. He will not compel you to accept his help. [1993, 7]

Each victim of abuse should know that, unlike her abuser, Jesus will not violate her agency by forcing himself upon her.<sup>36</sup>

Based on the principle of agency, all beings seeking at-one-ment must also realize that ultimately they are responsible for their own happiness. The grace of Jesus Christ is “an enabling power” (“Grace” 1986)—that is, a power that enables us to act. Knowing that she is capable of action and of learning to act is especially important for the survivor of abuse. Therapist Steven Farmer counsels in *Adult Children of Abusive Parents*: “Any time you fail to take personal responsibility, you [will] feel a familiar sense of helplessness and powerlessness” (1989, 154; see also 157).<sup>37</sup> As the abuse survivor begins to take responsibility for her life, to act upon her God-given agency, however, her ability to act will increase, she can unlearn her “learned helplessness” (Walker 1979, 42–54), and transformation of her suffering will become possible.

### Conclusion

In an essay entitled “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” Alice Walker wrote of her discovery in the Smithsonian Institution of a quilt unlike any other in the world. In fanciful, inspired, and yet simple and identifiable figures, it portrays the story of the Crucifixion. [This quilt] is considered rare, beyond price. Though it follows no known pattern of quilt-making, and though it is made of bits and pieces of worthless rags, it is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling... This quilt... was made by “an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago” ... an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use. [1984, 239]

As described here by Walker, the process of quilt-making summarizes well the transforming power of the atonement of Jesus Christ from a feminist perspective. “When we make patchwork quilts from hundreds of pieces of cloth from all kinds of garments, we create and [we] redeem” (Grey 1990, 6). Through at-one-ment,

"God is [similarly] able to present new, transforming possibilities to [each] situation" in our lives (Grey 1990, 45). "Behold," Jesus declares, "I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5; see also 2 Cor. 5:17). As he works "the miracle of bringing good out of evil" (Toscano and Toscano 1990, 115), redemption occurs. "Come unto me," he says, "all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

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## NOTES

1 "We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men [and also some women], as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (D&C 121:39).

2 I have limited my discussion in this paper primarily to the stereotype of men as abusers and women as the abused. This is not because I am unaware that "males are victims too" (Kocherhans 1993). Abuse of men by their wives does exist, as do mutually violent relationships. However, I believe that "it would be a great mistake if our... awareness of husband abuse were to deflect attention from wives as victims" (Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 343). Violence by husbands is more dangerous, more damaging, and more often repeated over time; much of wives' violence appears to be in self-defense; and husbands generally have the economic resources to leave an abusive relationship within a short time (Castleton 1990, 92; Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 343).

3 I do, of course, include male as well as female children as victims in my discussion. Sonia Johnson argues that "largely because women and children are always associated in men's minds... male children sometimes suffer the fallout" as victims of sexual abuse (1987, 357 fn 11), as they also do as victims of physical and emotional abuse. However, "over 90 percent of [sexual abusers] are men" (Engel 1989, 26). Those women who physically and/or emotionally abuse their children, I believe, frequently are acting as victims themselves of the "patriarchal pressure cooker" (Radl 1983, 79-86) or are (under the hierarchical structure within patriarchy of men over women, women over children) exercising the only power they believe they have. So again it would be a mistake to deflect attention from women and children as victims and men as perpetrators.

3 By "patriarchy," I intend not only the literal meaning of the word—"the rule of the fathers"—but also, and perhaps more significantly, "a culture whose driving ethos is an embodiment of masculinist ideals and practices." Masculinism can be defined as "the elevation of the masculine, conceptually and physically, to the level of the universal and the ideal. It is the valuing of men above women. It is, as well, an honoring of a male principle (conceived of as Mars, a warring configuration of qualities) above the female (conceived of as Venus, a serving and nurturing configuration)" (Ruth 1990, 45, 54).

4 For some personal accounts of family violence specifically among Mormons, see Castleton 1990, Daniels and Scott 1992, Sillitoe 1990, and "What Survivors of Abuse Want Others to Know" 1993, 78-79.

5 For alternate interpretations of "the rod," see Anderson and Blanchard 1993, 86 and Yorgason and Oaks 1992, 100.

6 Until recently Paul's counsel was echoed for Mormon women in their temple covenant to obey the law of their husbands. The lay Mormon priesthood continues to be all male, resulting in a tendency for some Mormon patriarchs to justify: "I have power because of the priesthood; therefore, I have power over you."

7 General conference talks addressing the topic of domestic abuse include Benson 1983, Faust 1993 and 1988; Hinkley 1991 (November), "Daughters of God" and "Our Solemn Responsibilities" and 1991 (May); Monson 1991 and 1990; and Scott 1992. Other *Ensign* articles on the subject include Jardine and Jardine 1990; Murdock 1993, and Peterson 1989. Two Relief Society lessons on abuse are included in the currently used personal study guides, "Safeguarding Our Children" [from sexual abuse] (1990) and "Love One another: the Prevention of [Spouse] Abuse" (1991). The 1989 Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide included its own version of "Love One Another—The Prevention of Abuse." The Church has also published a pamphlet, "Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse" (1991).

In addition, Church-owned Deseret Book recently published two books dealing with the subject: the best-selling collection *Confronting Abuse*, "written by several concerned LDS experts on abuse, religious leaders, and victims" (Horton et al. 1993, xi), and a popular novel entitled *Secrets*, which depicts the abuse that pervades one Mormon ward, "based upon the lives and experiences of [real] Latter-day Saints" (Yorgason and Oaks 1992, 503). *Confronting Abuse* shot to number four on Deseret Book's top-ten list of retail best-sellers just one month after its mid-February 1993 release (Jenkins 1993, 37). The tremendous interest in these books, it seems to me, is evidence that a problem with abuse does indeed exist within Mormonism.

8 "Breaking the silence" is an important message in many books and articles on the healing process. See, for example, Daniels and Scott 1993, x, 164; Engel 1989, 68; Farmer 1989, 34; Hanni 1993, 265; and "The Path to Wholeness" 1993, 367-368.

9 My understanding of atonement doctrines comes principally from my reading of Brown (1992 and 1989), Finger (1988), Grey (1990) and McMurrin (1965).

10 This theory has also been referred to as the Latin or Western model (Grey 1990), the penal theory (Brown 1989; Hick 1988; Grey 1990), and the "substitutionary" model (Finger 1988). McMurrin (1965) actually distinguishes between the "substitutionary" theory as that taught by the early church, and the "satisfaction" model as that developed by Anselm, but I cannot see his theological distinction.

11 Former Mormon Church president David O. McKay preached the responsibility of Church

members "to make our homes such as will radiate to our neighbors harmony, love, community duties, loyalty... You do what you can to produce peace and harmony, *no matter what you suffer*" (in Covey 1982, 162; emphasis mine). While I believe McKay did not intend to cause harm, based on advice such as his, the abuse victim may sacrifice herself—or be sacrificed by her abuser—even for the *image* of harmonious family life. "In [the 'perfection syndrome'], a family feels it must *look good* to outsiders, even though it may not actually be good on the inside. To maintain the image of perfection for their neighbors, friends, and ward members, [some members of the family] are willing to sacrifice the well-being of [other] family members" or themselves (Paxman 1993, 6; see also Radl 1983, 81-84). See Paxman 1993, 7-8 for an observation of the "perfection syndrome" at a testimonium meeting. In the account of child sexual abuse among Mormons in *Paperdolls* (Daniels and Scott 1992), belief in the image of perfection blinded concerned individuals even to the existence of a problem (110) and apparently the "perfection syndrome" among Church leaders deterred them from taking any official Church action against the perpetrators (84-87, 192). Ironically, Christ offers the atonement to us precisely *because* we are imperfect; to present to others the charade of perfection seems to me to deny the power of atonement.

12 Mormonism rejects the cross as the primary symbol of its belief system, and thereby, I believe, rejects at least to some extent the death emphasis of the satisfaction theory. Bruce R. McConkie explains in *Mormon Doctrine* that the use of "symbolic crosses in the architecture of... buildings and as jewelry... is inharmonious with the quiet spirit of worship and reverence that should attend a true Christian's remembrance of our Lord's sufferings and death." And yet we as Mormons still talk about taking up our crosses. In fact, immediately following his rejection of the symbolic cross in architecture and jewelry, McConkie explains that "any great affliction or trial that comes upon the saints does in itself constitute a *cross* they must bear as part of their obligation to overcome the world" (1979, 172-173). Marvin Ashton of the Council of the Twelve similarly stated that "we in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints... try to teach our people to carry their crosses rather than display or wear them" (1987, 137). However, I fail to comprehend why the cross is inappropriate and inharmonious as a physical symbol, but acceptable, even useful, as a psychological image.

13 For discussions on grace, see Silva 1992 and Toscano and Toscano 1990, 116-129.

14 See Douglas 1989 for one man's application of the story of the "undersized tax collector"—Zacchaeus of Jericho (Luke 19:2-10)—to his personal understanding of the concept of grace.

15 I am indebted to Lorie Winder Stromberg for suggesting to me the dichotomous nature of acceptance and activism.

16 Neal Maxwell recently spoke about the "evils... [of] the last days" (D&C 89:4), specifically identifying abortion and gang activity as two of those evils (1993, 76), both of which I believe also illustrate well the idea that personal sin and systemic sin are profoundly related.

17 See also Ulrich 1991, who asserts that "there is an important place in the gospel for candid examination of the impact of our parents' transgressions in our lives" (30-31).

18 Brown (1992 and 1989) and Finger (1988) use the term "moral influence," while McMurrin (1965) refers to this concept simply as the "moral" theory.

19 For a more extensive illustration of the world at Jesus' time, see Hamerton-Kelly 1979.

20 For the record, I believe Jesus can be called a feminist, if for no other reason than he is "the true Light" (John 1:9) and he is "the Way" (John 14:6), and therefore embodies all "light and truth [that] forsake that evil one" (D&C 93:37), including feminism.

21 Swenson goes on to say: "I am very good at respecting the individualism of my husband and my children. Hey, I'm *great* at respecting the individualism of the dog. But I don't respect my own individuality very much. I've struggled with the challenge of finding my self and taking care of that self in ways that are neither self-indulgent nor self-obliterating" (1992, 246). In a psychology of assertion class I took in 1992 we developed the term *selfing* (as opposed to *selfish*) to represent beneficial and necessary attention to self.

22 Grey (1990) labels this theory the Greek Patristic model. The theory has also been called the "ransom" theory on the basis that it provides that "the souls of men [and women] are purchased from the devil by God who uses Christ as the purchase price or ransom[,] resulting in a triumph of Christ over the devil and his powers" (McMurrin 1965, 85). Mark 10:45 provides some scriptural justification for this view: "For... the Son of man came... to give his life a ransom for many."

23 In *Secrets* the stake president attempts to offer consolation with the idea of an eternal reward for suffering: "Such a reward would certainly make sense. If God is a just God, and He is, then He cannot allow someone to take from the innocent their happiness and emotional well-being, literally their agency, without giving them a just compensation in some other way and *at some other time*" (Yorgason and Oaks 1993, 245; emphasis mine).

24 Mary Grey identifies Mary Daly, Sheila Collins, and Helga Sorge as examples of those in the "category of feminist theology which totally rejects atonement doctrines" (1990, 152-153).

25 The dictionary defines feminism as "the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men." But what I mean by "feminism" is not only my concerns for women's rights and women's issues, but also, and more importantly, what Sonia Johnson describes as "a totally different human possibility, a non-patriarchal way of being in the world... a new universal habit, a new mind... a perspective, a way of looking at all the issues [and] a framework for evaluating them" (1987, 237).

26 Incorporating the works of Carol Gilligan and theologian Valerie Saiving (1979), Pentz examines specifically "three of Jesus' encounters with women—his encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-30), with Martha (Luke 10:38-42), and with an unidentified female in a crowd (Luke 11:27-28)" (1988, 84-85).

27 I appreciate Laraine Wilkins for making this statement, as well as for encouraging me in writing this paper and in other feminist pursuits.

28 The words of this song in the current Primary songbook have been changed. The third line now reads, "I want to do just what is best" (Harrison 1989).

29 Sheila A. Redmond, in a discussion of "Recovery from Child Sexual Abuse," states that "the picture of Jesus drawn for us in the Gospel of John plays an enormous role in the mind of most Christians. This Gospel emphasizes Jesus'... willingness to go to the cross to die, uncomplaining. John's Jesus teaches that one must accept willingly whatever the father does, for whatever the father does is right, justifiable, and must be obeyed" (1989, 78-79). Alice Miller, discussing the biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22), also links the "virtue" of obedience to today's victimization of

children (1990, 138–145).

30 I am indebted to David K. Hart, from whom I took a graduate course in ethics at BYU in 1986, for first introducing me to this concept. In an address at the 1992 BYU Women's Conference, Meg Wheatley also explored the idea that what God wants is our joy (1993).

31 The character Jeanne in *Secrets* (Yorgason and Oaks 1992) is an example of an abuse victim who blames herself for her abuse, but she also shows how an abuse victim can free herself of this guilt. For information on "forgiving yourself," see also Engel 1989, 171–180. Significantly, Boyd K. Packer, in an address on handicaps and disabilities, taught that "the idea that all suffering is somehow the direct result of [personal] sin has been taught since ancient times. It is false doctrine" (1991, 7). For discussions on why there is suffering, see Charles 1993 and Fortune 1989.

32 Not only is personal healing impeded, an "inappropriate conception of justice" is also a factor in abused children themselves becoming abusive parents (Lamanna and Riedmann 1991, 422–423).

33 I use the plural *acts* to include the *entirety* of Jesus' existence—premortals life, earthly ministry, death and resurrection, and even his continuing influence in our lives.

34 Such a concept of atonement is crucial even for the sinner since "sin exists precisely in the distortion of relationality, including relation to oneself" (Ruether 1983, 181).

35 "The whole gospel story is one of a call to a new dynamic of community-relating (John 13:34)" (Grey 1990, 129; see also Drane 1979, 108).

36 I am indebted to sociologist Martha N. Beck for her statement to this effect as part of a panel discussion "Power of Force, Power of Grace: Abuse and Healing in Latter-day Homes" at the 1993 BYU Women's Conference.

37 Farmer goes on to say: "Disavowing your personal power is a lot like walking out in the rain unprotected, knowing full well it's raining, yet complaining because you're getting wet. You can't stop the rain, but you can either choose to get out of the rain or... you can choose how to feel about standing in the rain. In either case you're taking personal responsibility for your choice. It's important to note that taking personal responsibility does not mean taking the blame or feeling guilty. It has nothing to do with blame or guilt. Instead, it is an unqualified recognition of the fact that you are the captain of your own ship and you choose how to sail it" (1989, 154).

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## Letters

Dear Mother in Heaven:

I am writing to you from a relatively small place on the planet called Salt Lake City. It's run by a group of men who pray to Father a lot, and who insist that praying to you is dangerous and very close to sin. I want to ask you about that but I don't want to contaminate their spiritual prayer line and get excommunicated, so I am using the U.S. Postal Service. This seems to be safer, religiously speaking.

You see, some of my sisters are very sad right now and hurt a lot because they were told by the Mormon priesthood to shut up, and not to talk about you and your Heavenly Family. Personally, I have no problem being close to you. I know that you were there at the birth of my babies, at the death of a grandchild, when I was sick in the hospital, when I worried about my sister having cancer. Right now I am wondering if you ever talk to your sons—my brothers? Do some of them have a hearing problem? You are shaking your head, "it's the HEART," you say.

Would you please ask Father to stop creating other worlds for a moment, and to pay attention to Salt Lake City? Oh, he already knows what's going on... he does not like people who sit in judgement over other people. That figures. So is it O.K. if I keep praying to you? I know you preside over birth on this earth, and as one of my daughters is expecting a baby, I'll talk to you soon.

Your loving daughter,  
Mimi

Dear Mormon Women's Forum,

My mother recently gave me a copy of your July 1992 issue entitled, "How Shall We Worship God the Mother?" I was deeply moved by what I read. I have been searching for a long time to find a role model woman and mother. Of course our Heavenly Mother would be the best example for us as women, just as Heavenly Father is the best example of manhood and fatherhood. I appreciated how your panel discussion covered all sides of this controversial issue equally. New ideas cannot be rammed down anyone's throat; each of us must come to accept them as we are ready. I was saddened rather than surprised to learn how much opposition there is to worshipping God the Mother.

However, ignorance, complacency and fear can only be overcome by education and time.

Rebecca Reber

Dear Friends,

I heard about your organization from the Donahue Show and I am very interested. We don't get to hear much about these sorts of things over here in Australia.

I have been a member of the Mormon Church for over 35 years, however I "woke up" about a year ago and have only been a few times in the last year. I have only realized also in the past year my feminist leanings.

I have been pretty much ostracized by the members of the church apart from one or two and my husband and one of my daughters have moved out.

I have had a lot of questions about church which no one wants to answer, even my husband was threatened by my questions.

I would really like to know more about your organization and I would appreciate any relevant literature.

Yours sincerely,  
Helen Tracey-Smith

Dear Mormon Women's Forum,

I am a newly arrived feminist. I have worshipped Heavenly *Parents* all my life. Thank you for having the courage to lead the way. Thank you for helping those of us who are struggling to stay active in the church.

Glenda Barker

Thanks for the Special Edition—the information was timely and most helpful to understand comments made in the public press and general conference.

J. Frederick Pingree

Dear Sisters:

Thank you for your most recent publication. I salute you for your courage. I hope this money will help with extra expense. Without it I would never have known any details.

Sincerely,  
Jessica Gil

Dear Forum—

Thank you for publishing Lavina's latest list. You are doing a great job. ...

[P]lease forgive me if I wear my white ribbon with the "head" at the top and both feet firmly planted. The other way looks like a submissive puppy with its feet in the air. Oh Dr. Freud! Over here please.

Dorothy Wilkinson

P.S. Is the "Committee" listening?



## Book Review



### *The Path to Wholeness.*

Carol Tuttle

American Fork, Utah: Covenant  
Communications, 1993

Reviewed by Kathleen A. McDonald

One of the challenges confronting feminists is defining which experiences of women are useful in reconfiguring societal constructs and cultural institutions. Although the experiences of conservative, religious women are frequently ignored or denigrated, it is critical that feminists include these experiences in the feminist discourse. Carol Tuttle's book on healing from sexual abuse fills such a role.

*The Path to Wholeness* is a Christian-oriented resource for survivors of sexual abuse which has as its purpose "how to progress from being a victim of abuse to choosing to heal by coming unto Christ" (p. 11). Using the gospel in general, and Christ in particular, as her focus, Tuttle offers a blueprint for traveling the torturous road of recovery. This book will certainly find an audience among conservative religious women, including Mormons, who might otherwise be alienated by traditional therapeutic resources which tend to lack a religious grounding.

Conversely, this book may alienate survivors for whom religion has not assisted in their healing. In my own recovery, I have not found the Church nor the male-oriented gospel to be a source of comfort, hope or strength; instead, my pain has been exacerbated by sexist and overly-simplistic discourse, scriptures, and lessons. With its Christian focus, aspects of Tuttle's book affect me similarly. For example, the book's emphasis on connecting with male deity does not encourage me, but makes me long for connection with Heavenly Mother all the more. I am also frustrated by the well-intentioned but misguided notion that "if we will do all that we can, the Lord will do the rest to make us successful in what he has asked of us" (pp. 15-16, quoting Patricia Pinegar)—when, in fact, sometimes one's best does not bring success. I disagree with Tuttle's implication that the healing process is directed so closely by God that even the resurfacing of our memories is due to God's

decision to give them to us (p. 20). In addition, it is questionable whether healing can ever be so thorough and complete as to allow us to "live a life free of the residual effects of this all-encompassing childhood trauma and live with the freedom to make choices *as if the abuse never happened*" (p. 8, emphasis added).

Tuttle's brush is too broad when she depicts Church leaders as sensitive to, knowledgeable about and supportive of recovery from abuse. For example, she quotes Elder Richard G. Scott in a way which implies that he understands the process of healing (p. 16), when in fact his General Conference talk offered nothing more than the standard priesthood-guided "pray and read the scriptures" approach while exhorting victims to avoid "improper therapeutic practices," to beware of false memories which could form the basis of unfair accusations, and to determine whether one's own behavior contributed to one's abuse (see *The Ensign*, May 1992, pp. 31-33). While Tuttle's candor about the lack of initial acceptance by Church members to her story of abuse (p. 83) and the book's section entitled "Feeling Forsaken by Your Church and Its Members" is welcome, this honesty is overshadowed by the apologetic tone she then adopts to explain away the otherwise very un-Christlike behavior of people who purport to live Christlike lives (pp. 123-127). Moreover, her assertion that "[a]buse did not happen because of their religious affiliation; it happened in spite of it" (p. 197) is debatable. Experts have demonstrated that abuse of all kinds breeds more rampantly in a highly rigid, patriarchal, obedience-oriented culture than in a culture lacking such characteristics.

If the reader can get past these blocks, the book has much to offer in terms of practical advice, exercises, written resources, starting or joining a support group (although Tuttle's bias towards LDS groups is apparent), and first-person accounts by survivors. The chapter on forgiveness is the best I have encountered in recovery literature. In it, Tuttle minces no words when asserting that forgiving one's abuser is an intensely personal choice to be made only at the conclusion of the healing process. Other very enlightening parts of the book are the Epilogue, where we hear Tuttle speak in honest, raw emotional terms of her pain and struggle, and in the first-person account by Tuttle's husband,

who offers helpful insights from the perspective of the survivor's partner.

Finally, for all my reservations about the "churchiness" of the book's tone and focus, I was impressed by Tuttle's use of scripture to illustrate many of her points. She breathes new life into scriptures made tired by traditional interpretations focused on a person's obedience or lack thereof to the gospel and instead makes the verses particularly meaningful to the abuse survivor. For example, I was deeply moved by her analogy of the parable of the lost sheep to the survivor's search for her lost Inner Child (pp. 61-63). Anyone who has reclaimed her long-buried innocence can appreciate how a very precious part of herself was once lost, but ultimately regained. To open her chapter on remembering, Tuttle quotes John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (p. 19), to emphasize the importance of allowing painful memories to surface in order to work through them in furthering the healing process. Survivors often struggle with accepting and trusting their own perceptions and recollections; Tuttle's use of scripture in this instance sanctions this critical activity and lends God's support to it.

In the ever-expanding selection of abuse recovery aids, it is important that the voices of all women be heard and responded to. While I would not characterize Tuttle's work as a truly feminist approach, given its conservative religious focus, and for this reason would not expect religious feminists to respond enthusiastically to it, this book is an admirable step in the direction of addressing the needs of women for whom Christianity is an integral part of life.



## BYU flack update

Cecilia Konchar Farr withdrew her appeal of BYU's "no-candidacy" recommendation after reaching an undisclosed agreement with school officials.

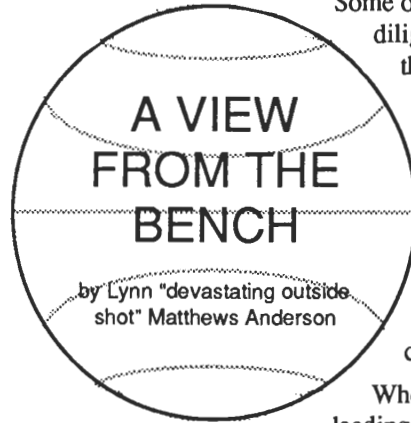
"They did the right thing by taking back what they said about my teaching and scholarship," Farr said. "I don't think they've done the right thing by putting me in a position where I was forced to resign." Officials would not say if the agreement included a cash settlement. *[We hope it did!]*

Anthropologist David Knowlton's appeal was denied. About 250 BYU students publicly "mourned" the pending departure of these two faculty members.



Imagine, if you will, a basketball team, with both men and women listed on the official roster.

Some of the women are naturally athletic and talented and have diligently practiced and memorized the game plan. Indeed, the coaches and managers have encouraged the women to develop their playing skills as much as possible. Consequently, some women play as well as the best men. At game time, however, the team managers—all male—allow only men on the court. The managers tell the women that it is much more important for them to be cheerleaders than it is to be players. (The managers even pick some women to be the head cheerleaders, but the managers still have to approve the cheerleading routines.)



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When some women complain that they don't like cheerleading and would much rather play, they are told various things: "basketball has always been a men's game"; "you are naturally suited to be cheerleaders, not players"; "we don't want you to get injured out there on the basketball court"; "you play far better than the men so the men really need to have the time on the court." If some women ask why they were encouraged to develop their playing skills if they weren't going to be able to use them, or if they still insist they could be of more value to the team by playing rather than cheerleading, the managers tell them that "you will be better able to train the next generation of basketball players," or "what you're saying is that you really don't like basketball," or "you don't really want to be on this team."

If the women have the audacity to ask the team managers if they've asked what the team owner thinks about the way they're running the game, they are accused of trying to undermine team morale, of really being "for" the other team. (Some women who like cheerleading accuse the women who want to play of wanting to force *all* women to play. And of course, men who don't want to play or would rather lead cheers don't fare well either.) Many cheerleaders and male players are quick to come to the managers' defense and say that "of course the managers have consulted with the team owner—it's the owner's team, isn't it?" But the managers themselves never answer the question directly, so the women who want to play still don't know if the managers have ever asked, or if the owner really is responsible for their not being allowed to play. As these women continue to ask, the managers will occasionally instruct some of the male players and coaches to escort the "uncooperative" women out of the playing arena, take back their uniforms and equipment, and scratch their names from the roster entirely.

The game is not yet over, and the other team is making points. When the other team gets too far ahead, perhaps the managers really will think to ask the owner if it's okay to use some of the team's best players on court, even if they are women. Or maybe the owner, having been directly informed about what's going on by those who don't think the policies are fair or in the team's best interests, will finally have to intervene directly by retiring some of the most closed-minded managers, or by sending a memo.

Is this any way to run a basketball team?



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