

Churches Tackling Gender-Based Violence:

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Cheap Grace

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VAW as a Challenge for the Global Church

The World Health Organisation statistics on VAW (Violence Against Women) describes it as a 'major public health problem and violation of women's rights'.

VAW is not just a problem in the Pacific, it is:

- a global problem
- a challenge for everyone in every society
- a social issue that the churches are well placed to address – but church response are often limited and sometimes reinforce the danger and damage.

VAW as a Challenge for the Global Church

- ‘Recent global prevalence figures indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.
- Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.
- Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.’

World Health Organisation, *Factsheet: Violence Against Women*, January 2016.
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>. Accessed on 14 May 2016.

Nadi Accord 11 April 2014

We call upon Religious Leaders:

- To acknowledge and address the high rates of domestic violence in the Pacific and we urge religious leaders to champion the elimination of SGBV and to act with strong leadership in this regard. Religion or culture or tradition never justifies the use of sexual and gender based violence.

A Symposium on Culture and Religion was convened by the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP) in Nadi, Fiji from 6th to 11th April 2014

GBV and VAW

Our project is focussing on VAW within a broader context of GBV.

The figures that he heard this morning explain why

90% of survivors/victims are female

90% of offenders are male

Facing the Issue of VAW

The issue is so grave it leads to death.

Nalini Singh

Damaging Responses

All too common for women who are victims of intimate partner violence to be counselled by religious leadership in the church that the violence they endure is ‘their cross to bear’, as staying and working to keep the family together and work toward the abuser’s redemption is God’s plan.

Marit Trelstad, ‘Putting the Cross in Context: Atonement Through Covenant,’ in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*, Mary J. Streufert, ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010, 112-113

Damaging Responses

‘I went to my priest twenty years ago. I've been trying to follow his advice. The priest said I should rejoice in my sufferings because they bring me closer to Jesus. He said, 'Jesus suffered because he loved us.' He said, 'If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.' I've tried, but I'm not sure anymore. My husband is turning on the kids now. Tell me, is what the priest told me true?’

Susan Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), p. 21.

'Dangerous Forgiveness'

Women are also sometimes taught marriage is sacred and they should stay in it no matter what.

Based on a distorted reading of Ephesians 5.20-25, women report being told by churches to be submissive, even to an abusive husband.

Often women are told to forgive and reconcile with their abusive husbands.

Discussion

- How should churches be supporting women who are experiencing abuse?
- What role should forgiveness have in these situations, and how can church teaching on forgiveness promote safety and support for women, and prevent the cycle of violence?
- How can community reconciliation be done to ensure the safety of women, and promote peace, justice and dignity for women?

Advice to churches on addressing VAW

CONFRONT IT – Do not ignore it. Don't pretend it will go away. Don't pretend it did not happen. Disclose it to your family and friends. Why – because you can't deal with it on your own.

Stephen Pallaras

Shame, Stigma and Forgiveness

Tamar protests to Amnon (2 Samuel 13.12-13) 'She answered him, 'No my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile!

As for me, where could I carry my shame?'

If Tamar 'carried her shame' to your church, how would your church respond? Would it lift her burden, or make it heavier?

Would your church 'forgive' Tamar?



TATALA LE TA'UI A LE ATUA

Rolling out the fine mat of scripture



Friday 16 March 2018 | 9am – 6pm
Piula Theological College Hall
All Welcome

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