

RELIGION AND RADICALISM

Rape Culture, Gender Violence, & Religion

Christian Perspectives

EDITED BY CAROLINE BLYTH,
EMILY COLGAN, KATIE B. EDWARDS



Religion and Radicalism

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‘Radical’ derives from the Latin *radix* meaning ‘root’ or ‘origin’. Radical movements represent a challenge to established views by returning to a thorough critique of the fundamental ideas, principles and structures upon which political and social systems are formed. While on the one hand, religion is often accused of fuelling intolerance, terrorism, or even of starting wars, it is, on the other hand, often invoked by individuals and movements as providing nourishment for struggles against injustice and exploitation. The ‘Religion and Radicalism’ book series is concerned with left-wing radicalism, broadly understood, and the way religious discourse, beliefs, traditions, and texts are invoked in relation to progressive politics. The series responds to a growing interest in the role that religion can play both as a vehicle for cultural change but also as a means of legitimating reactionary impulses in society.

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PREFACE

Back in 2014, two of us (Emily and Caroline) met up to discuss the possibility of co-editing a single volume that explored the complex and multifaceted relationships between rape culture, gender violence, and religion. After putting out a general call for papers, we were inundated with responses; these came from academics, practitioners, and graduate students located throughout the globe, who were working in a range of disciplinary areas, including religious studies, biblical studies, anthropology, philosophy, education, film production, gender studies, sociology, theology, linguistics, and counselling. It quickly became clear that there were simply too many essential voices and perspectives to be contained within a single volume; there was obviously a thirst for scholarly and praxis-led engagement within this area. Most of the potential contributors who contacted us expressed their appreciation that we sought to provide a platform upon which to participate in this conversation. Acutely aware that our scholarly research and practice is carried out in the context of a global rape culture, where gender violence has reached epidemic levels, the overwhelming feedback we received was that such a conversation was well overdue and therefore urgent.

As we began to collate the chapter abstracts we had been sent, we were struck by two realizations. First, these abstracts fell within three main categories, engaging with the subject of gender violence and rape culture from either biblical, Christian, or interdisciplinary perspectives. This offered us a natural structure for arranging the chapters into not one but three volumes, which we hoped would be published as a stand-alone series. Second, in light of the way this project had expanded beyond our initial expectations,

we decided it was prudent to bring in another co-editor whose expertise in this area would help us manage this ambitious project. We therefore invited Katie to join the editorial team, and to our delight, she agreed. Working together, we have pooled our editorial skills and experience to produce three volumes that we believe are an immensely timely contribution to an ongoing international dialogue within this field of research.

The three volumes can be read either together or independently of each other; each one provides a rich overview of some of the unique scholarship being carried out in a range of disciplinary areas. Together or apart, the volumes are not exhaustive in their analysis of rape culture, gender violence, and religion; given the massive complexity of these subjects and the infinite ways in which they intersect, even three volumes can only ever be a drop in the scholarly ocean. Rather, our intention is to offer readers a way to begin or continue conversations about this vital issue. As you read through the chapters in this volume, we hope that you are inspired to create conversations within your own contexts and communities.

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Sheffield, UK

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Ngā mihi aroha.

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Jordan Haynie Ware is an Anglican priest in the diocese of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Originally from the United States, she holds a Bachelor of Arts with Special Honours in liberal arts from the University of Texas, Austin, and a Master of Divinity from Yale Divinity School. She is also the author of *The Ultimate Quest: A Geek's Guide to (the Episcopal) Church*, and is co-host of the podcast *Two Feminists Annotate the Bible*. Her primary research interests include the intersections of faith, feminism, social justice, and pop culture.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards

We live in a global rape culture; gender violence has reached endemic levels in numerous countries and communities around the world, where sexual violence, family violence, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia have become a lived reality for many people (e.g. see UN Women 2017; United Nations Population Fund 2016; UNESCO 2016). Situated within this global rape culture, Christianity has, throughout its history and up to the present day, played a significant and often contentious role in shaping the social imaginary—or collective consciousness—surrounding gender violence. Within Christian interpretative traditions, certain biblical texts have often been used uncritically to support patriarchal gender hierarchies and cis-heteronormative discourses, which work to sustain and sanctify multiple forms of gendered violence (see e.g. Nason-Clark 1997; Haddad 2011; Vorster 2012). Church teachings (and church leaders) have counselled

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women to remain within violent marriages and forgive their abusers, promoted intolerance and negated the full humanity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans(gender) (LGBT) people, and sustained chronic levels of sexism and heteropatriarchy within church hierarchies, all in the name of the Christian faith. Equally problematic, in the past few decades, horrific levels of child abuse perpetrated by Christian individuals and institutions have come to light, despite systemic and self-preservatory attempts by these institutions to cover up this abuse.

To be sure, some Christian theologians and church leaders have responded to these issues by calling out and critiquing the complicity of the church and the Christian faith in perpetuating gender violence (e.g. see Adams and Fortune 1998; Althaus-Reid 2000, 2003; Fortune 1983, 2012; Nason-Clark 1999; Sneed 2010). Moreover, a number of Christian communities and organizations have begun to organize their efforts in educating congregants about gender violence prevention, as well as providing services that offer survivors pastoral care and support in their long journey towards healing. Laudable as these efforts doubtlessly are, they nevertheless do little to challenge the deeply entrenched structures, ideologies, and traditions within Christianity that play an undeniable role in sustaining gender violence within today's global rape culture. To paraphrase Marie Marshall Fortune (2012, pp. 469–470), it is high time that members of the Christian community opened their eyes and ears to the pain of gender violence survivors, acknowledged the church's responsibility to help survivors seek justice and healing, and admitted that the voices of these survivors have been (and continue to be) silenced by centuries of Christian teachings and traditions.

The aim of this volume is therefore to encourage and sustain conversations within the Christian tradition about this crucial issue. Weaving together insights from pastors, chaplains, sociologists, theologians, pastoral care providers, counsellors, and biblical scholars, the following chapters interrogate the complex and multifaceted relationships that exist between Christianity and gender violence. Authors approach this subject from a range of disciplinary perspectives, but all write from a place of recognition that urgent change is needed, and all share a commitment to making this change happen—within the academy, wider society, *and* the Christian community. The conversations included in this volume are by no means exhaustive in their analysis of this topic. Nor do any claim to hold “all the answers” to address this hugely complex problem. Nevertheless, we hope that readers are inspired to engage fruitfully in these conversations *and*

begin their own. Our aim here is to foster transformative dialogues with the Christian community about our *shared* responsibility to end gender violence.

Starting off the conversation in Chap. 2, biblical scholar Emily Colgan delves into the best-selling book *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul*, written by evangelical Christian couple Stasi and John Eldredge. The book offers Christian female readers guidance about what it means to live as a fully alive and feminine woman: a woman who is truly “captivating.” Drawing on a feminist epistemology, Colgan explores the imagery and ideology surrounding the depiction of women within this book. She contends that the gendered classifications at the heart of *Captivating* encode a patriarchal heteronormative logic, which contributes to an underlying rhetoric of gender violence and rape-supportive discourse. Through a close investigation of this text, Colgan’s analysis lays bare the symbolic world constructed in *Captivating*, and considers the qualitative impact that this world may have upon those who participate in its rhetorical vision of gender roles and relationships.

In Chap. 3, Robert Berra continues this exploration of evangelical Christian gender discourses, focusing on the role of men’s ministries in perpetuating cis-heteronormative and patriarchal ideals of masculinity. Berra argues that patriarchal strands running through the fabric of Christian theology, history, and practice bear a significant measure of responsibility for creating conditions that bestow upon men a sense of entitlement to control and access others’ bodies (particularly women’s bodies). Men’s ministries may participate in perpetuating these strands, thereby (unwittingly or not) propagating rape myths that help to sustain rape cultures. Berra deliberates the appeal and theoretical underpinnings of men’s ministries, analysing their entreaty to churches to “invite men back,” in order to correct what they call “the feminization of the church.” Critiquing David Murrow’s best-selling book, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, as an example of the ambient level of sexism within some men’s ministry movements, he then sketches the difficulties and prospects—both practical and theological—of developing a men’s ministry as a site of resistance to rape culture.

In Chap. 4, the focus remains on problematic Christian discourses of masculinity, as Kathleen McPhillips explores Christian institutional contributions to cultures of sexual violence, looking particularly at the work of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013–2017). This Royal Commission has investigated the pervasive occurrence of child sexual abuse within different institutions in

Australia, including various faith-based communities. McPhillips explores the central reasons why sexual violence against children has been so widespread in religious organizations, especially the Catholic Church, which recorded the highest levels of child abuse of any organization investigated by the Commission. Specifically, she focuses on the abuses perpetrated within institutions run by the Marist Brothers, a male teaching order of Catholic celibate men, considering the particular role that its institutional framework and discourses of masculinity played in its culture of abuse.

Chapter 5 continues to interrogate church complicity in the perpetuation of gendered violence, as Daphne Marsden considers conservative Christian teachings on gender roles and hierarchies, and the ways that these are rooted in biblically based teachings on male headship and female submission. She explores both egalitarian and complementarian Christian readings of certain biblical texts, noting how the latter may validate patriarchal patterns of male hegemony, which justify spousal violence and prevent abused women from seeking or receiving support. Interspersed throughout her discussion are the testimonies of Christian women impacted by such violence, whose words illustrate first-hand some of the consequences of conservative Christian teachings on gender relationships. These women also serve as a reminder that the lives of *real* people are impacted by theological and biblical debates around church teachings and theologies. Marsden's chapter ends with some practical guidance on what churches can do to begin tackling spousal violence and the patriarchal ideologies that underpin it.

In Chap. 6, Jo Henderson-Merrygold investigates other Christian discourses which can likewise contribute to gender violence—in this case, the systemic and epistemic violence experienced by LGBT people. She discusses the historic significance of the church as arbiter of morality and decency, particularly its influence on the creation and perpetuation of what Michel Foucault (1979) called epistemes and discourses—those networks of beliefs, ideologies, social practices, and power relations that shape people's understandings of and engagements with the world. Focusing on Christian heteronormative discourses of gender and sexuality, Henderson-Merrygold considers the ways that these are drawn upon to prescribe the recognition of others' humanity in light of their gender identities and sexual preferences. Building on Gayatri Spivak's work on epistemic violence and Judith Butler's notion of "undoing" humanity, she explores how these discourses render queer lives and experiences unintelligible and *not* human, and the implications of this for the lived experiences of LGBT

people. Specifically, she argues that these discourses may sustain certain forms of epistemic and systemic violence against the LGBT community, identifying its members as “Other,” while denying recognition to their full humanity and thus rendering them increasingly marginalized and vulnerable.

In Chap. 7, Dianne Rayson stays with this focus on the humanity of the “Other” as she studies the writings of twentieth-century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the implications of his own theologies for contemporary discussions of gendered violence. Specifically, she focuses on Bonhoeffer’s early lecture “The Right to Self-Assertion” (1932), where he interrogates how power subverts relationships and ultimately results in the domination of the “Other” (including women) through systemic subjugation and war. Rayson examines this neglected piece of writing by Bonhoeffer in light of the problem of rape culture, and considers how the theological conditions for such a cultural injustice were articulated by Bonhoeffer from within his own context of 1930s Germany and the rise of Nazism. Consistent with the corpus of Bonhoeffer’s theological works, she suggests that notions of sociality and responsibility are key components of a “fully human” response to the injustice of gender violence.

Chapter 8 continues this theological focus, as Richard Davis contemplates the ways that Christian theological understandings of obedience and disobedience might contribute to domestic violence and abuse. He argues that, in largely Christian societies, including his own location in Oceania, notions of obedience and disobedience are heavily influenced by faith and, more specifically, by understandings of sin. Particularly, in both domestic and political spheres, theological notions of sin-as-disobedience may influence the ways that disobedience and obedience are understood. This in turn sustains power hierarchies and reinforces the indiscriminate imperative for obedience—of citizens to the state, of wives to their husbands—and justifies violence in the event of a person’s perceived “disobedience.” Davis suggests that by redefining the meaning of obedience and disobedience, and by considering sin within a more relational framework (sin-as-broken-relationships), Christianity may be better placed to begin the much-needed process of tackling gender violence.

In Chap. 9, we turn from the theoretical to the practical, as Lisa Spriggins discusses the praxis of “witnessing” in her counselling work with survivors of sexual violence. She argues that sexual violence desecrates the sanctity of humanity, violating relationships with self, others, the cosmos, and God. Drawing on Rambo’s theology of witnessing, she

explores the practice of witnessing as a form of meaning-making, and as a therapeutic act which promotes survivors' healing. She also discusses the personal effects of this witnessing for the counsellor, as she experiences her "self" as a woman in a society that creates, and recreates, gendered violence. As she participates in witnessing, Spriggs finds herself asking "What kind of person do I want to be in light of this work?" Considering the necessary call to social justice that follows witnessing, she invites readers to consider the small, and not so small, acts which allow us to take a stand against gendered violence. In attending to both the wellness of the survivor and larger societal change, she also explores how these different sites of working towards social justice might be supportive and generative in ways which counter some of the effects of witnessing to sexual violence.

Continuing with this focus on praxis, in Chap. 10, Philip Halstead weaves a fictional narrative that relates an incident of acquaintance rape between two church congregants. Through this creative exploration, he reflects on the psychological and spiritual impact that gender violence may have on the victim and the perpetrator, as well as all those others caught up in the trauma of events. Focusing on the character of the church pastor, Halstead traces the professional and personal challenges faced by those in positions of pastoral responsibility who are confronted with the task of providing spiritual care to individuals and communities impacted by gender violence. Amidst a cacophony of voices and conflicting advice, the pastor must navigate a path that offers the rape victim a source of healing and a means of moving forward. Halstead leads us through the pastor's journey, focusing in the latter part of the chapter on the pastor's threefold response to the crisis—namely, to practice pastoral presence to the hurting, educate parishioners about healthy interpersonal relationships and crisis management, and lead the victim through an authentic process of forgiveness. The chapter therefore offers a guide to and reflection on the vital role played by pastoral caregivers within the complex and traumatic events of rape.

Chapter 11 moves our focus from pastoral engagements with gender violence to cultural engagements, as Jordan Haynie Ware studies the relationships between religion and gender violence evoked in fantasy literature and drama. Specifically, Ware explores George R.R. Martin's fantasy novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Ron D. Moore's TV show *Battlestar Galactica*, examining the ways that religious leaders, institutions, and belief systems within these fantasy worlds are complicit in the perpetuation of

misogynistic gender roles and gender violence. By interrogating how these fictional religions either challenge or condone women's oppression and the perpetuation of rape, she reflects on Christianity's problematic silence and indifference about this current (and real-life) global crisis, drawing on the theology of *imago Dei* (humanity created in the image of God) within both fantasy religions and Christianity to inform her critique.

The volume ends with another contribution by Lisa Spriggs, who reminds us that there can be a personal impact on those of us who research and write about gendered and sexual violence. Noting that readers of this volume may also experience similar responses as they engage with the previous chapters, she thus offers a series of reflective questions that invite readers to contemplate this more deeply. The questions encourage readers to draw connections to personally held hopes and values, and to consider how community might be fostered amongst those who share our goals to tackle gender violence in all its forms within our research, our relationships, and our communities.

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CHAPTER 2

Let Him Romance You: Rape Culture and Gender Violence in Evangelical Christian Self-Help Literature

Emily Colgan

Since its publication in 2005, the book *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul* has dominated the Christian literature markets, selling millions of copies worldwide and rating highly on numerous bestseller charts.¹ It offers Christian female readers guidance and advice about what it means to live as a fully alive and feminine woman: a woman who is truly “captivating.” Revised and updated in 2010, *Captivating* continues to sell strongly, and is readily available in evangelical Christian bookstores worldwide. The authors—married evangelical-ministry partners, John and Stasi Eldredge—appear to have captured the hearts and minds of many Christian women; in fact, not only are there Bible studies centred around the book (Eldredge and Eldredge 2007a, b), but a published “guided journal” is available (Eldredge and Eldredge 2005),² as well as a *Captivating* video series (Eldredge and Eldredge 2009).³ Indeed, twelve years after its first publication, *Captivating* continues to be promoted globally in evangelical institutions; within evangelical subcultures, it is commonly considered a Christian “classic” (Hall 2016, p. 54).

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The Eldredges wrote *Captivating* as a companion to John Eldredge's 2001 publication *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*.⁴ Although there has been a significant level of academic engagement with Eldredge's call in *Wild at Heart* for Christian men to "reclaim an authentic masculinity,"⁵ very little has been written in response to *Captivating*. With this in mind, my chapter seeks to explore the imagery surrounding the depiction of women in this book, paying particular attention to the ideologies at play in the production of such imagery, and the demands that these ideologies make on readers in each new encounter with the text. It is my contention that the gendered codifications lying at the heart of *Captivating* are rooted in a sexual logic based on heterosexual binary ideals, which contribute to an underlying rhetoric of gender violence and rape.

Given the aims of this project, my analysis primarily employs a feminist epistemology; in particular, I draw upon the feminist critique of those hierarchical dualisms underlying the "logic of domination" which works to oppress women. Heather Eaton (2005, pp. 38–39) describes dualistic frameworks as structures of thought that conceive reality in pairs or opposites, with one side of the pair (men/spiritual/mind) having priority over the other (women/material/body respectively). The more privileged term of the binary pair is considered the norm against which all else is measured.⁶ From these hierarchically separated categories emerges the logic of domination, which holds that superiority bestows the right to rule. Domination is therefore considered both justified and natural.

I supplement this feminist hermeneutic with a rhetorical methodology, which provides an appropriate analytical tool for examining the symbolic representation of women in *Captivating*. This methodology recognizes the "world-creating power" of literary texts—the notion that reality is known and constructed through the shared symbols of the particular language used to describe it.⁷ That is, language is the means by which humanity views reality; phenomena in the world are made accessible to human understanding through symbols, including language. Through the process of description and naming, language determines both attitudes towards and knowledge about a particular thing (Burke 1954, pp. 176–177). In this way, literary texts shape ideologies, which, in turn, determine behaviour and action. As Paul Ricœur argues, there can be no lived reality or praxis which is not already symbolically structured in some way. Human action, he insists, is always prefigured in signs (1991, pp. 469–470). Thus, consumers of any given symbolic world (including

literary texts) are encouraged to embrace the projected reality to which those symbols point, in order that they might *dwell* in that world, embodying and enacting its reality.

This connection between language and reality, however, extends well beyond the initial appearance of a text in its original historical context. With each and every reading, a literary text continues to determine reality for readers throughout that text's history. As well as reflecting the ideologies of the community in which it was written, a text also has the potential to affirm those same ideologies within the subsequent communities where the text is received and read (Blyth 2010, p. 7). In recognizing the determinative quality of language, then, this chapter takes seriously the notion that the symbolic world of *Captivating* will have a qualitative impact on the social reality of those who participate in its rhetorical vision regarding women. Through the investigation of this text's inner workings—that is, the construction of its symbolic world—my rhetorical analysis will offer insight into the symbolic strategies at work therein. By paying attention to the rhetoric in *Captivating*, this methodology not only facilitates an analysis of the symbolic reality found in *Captivating*, it also explores the impact of these symbols upon readers.

DESIGNED DIFFERENTLY: GENDERED BINARIES

Right from the outset of *Captivating*, readers encounter explicit gender essentialism, which puts forward the idea that there are intrinsic distinctions between women and men. “A woman,” write the Eldredges, “is *not* the same as man (thank God!). She is designed differently” (2010, p. 213, emphasis original). Differences in needs, desires, personality, and temperament are fundamental to particular biological categories, distinguishing certain men as clearly male, and certain women as clearly female. According to the Eldredges, men “are the less complicated of the two genders” (p. 18). Men “are made for battle”—“it’s the whole thing with boys and weapons” (p. 18). They are warriors, “meant as the incarnation of ... our Warrior God” (p. 130, also 197).⁸ Indeed, they argue, strength is the essence of a man; it is “what the world longs to experience from [men]” (p. 132).

The model of femininity, on the other hand, is little more than an inversion of this idealized masculinity. While the authors of *Captivating* acknowledge the risk of stereotyping in recovering an “essential femininity,” this risk is instantly dismissed by the claim that “there is an essence