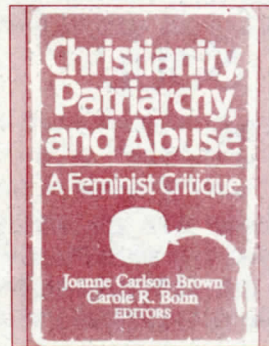


Abuse as Necessity

by Kathleen Maltzhan



Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique

Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds.
Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1989

“Children, thank you for your present. I’m finished now, it’s yours.”

The speaker was Antonio Sanchez, mayor of Calauan town (about 400km south of Manila); the ‘children’ he was referring to were his nephew, gardener and six body-guards, as well as one local policeman; and the present was Mary Eileen Sarmenta who was abducted by Sanchez’s men in 1993, ‘gifted’ to their boss, raped by him, given back to Mary Eileen’s abductors, raped again by each of them, then executed.

Sanchez and his men would later be meted seven life sentences each. After the sentencing, Sanchez was led out of the court room cursing and shrieking. The Marian devotee transformed into a raving, hysterical psychopath abusing bystanders and spitting out curses.

For months, Sanchez, who claims to be a Marian devotee, was a constant, grotesque presence in the media—he would be praying the rosary next to the Virgin Mary, or he would exhibit his severely calloused knees to prove that he constantly walked on bent knees down church aisles. “The Lord God and Mother Mary know,” he declared, “that I am innocent.”

The fusion of numbing violence and bizarre piety left most people disgusted. His God may think he’s innocent, many felt, but ours does not.

Sanchez’s religiosity was dismissed as either a public relations ploy, or yet another sign of the twistedness of the man, with no real connection to credible Christianity.

The book *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, however, makes it difficult to accept that Sanchez’s blend of religiosity and brutality is just his own personal project, without support from a christian ideology. All but one of the 10 articles contained in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse* look with astonishing honesty at Christianity and abuse, without the coating that often tries to reclaim christianity as inherently nice, with just a few unfortunate distortions that have allowed violence to seep in.

In one of the weakest chapters in the book, Marie F. Fortune attempts to do just that. Fortune says that both ‘self-blame’ and ‘God-blame’ “simply avoid... acknowledging that a particular person is responsible” for abuse. Self-blame is misdirected, and as for blaming God, within a religion pre-

mised on an all-loving, all-powerful God, this often comes from a search for a reason for something that actually happens “for no good reason,” from a blindness to the necessary, highly structured role of violence in a patriarchal system. Fortune remains bound to saving christianity: to cleaning up the mess of patriarchy while desperately trying to deny its presence.

In sharp contrast to this approach is the opening chapter, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker’s “For God So Loved the World?” The article takes the book’s introductory statement that “saving a tradition based on patriarchy is impossible” seriously, plunging straight into one of the central images of christianity, the cross. Why, the two ask, does a violent and torturous death become the inescapable entry point to life? Christianity has many answers to this question, with every single one of them presuming that suffering is a necessary ingredient for holiness. Even liberation theologies fail to challenge the necessity of suffering, but in a radical twist, Brown and Parkers declare that “to argue that salvation can only come through the cross is to make God a divine sadist and divine child abuser.” When any suffering is glorified, even Jesus Christ’s, all suf-

fering is glorified.

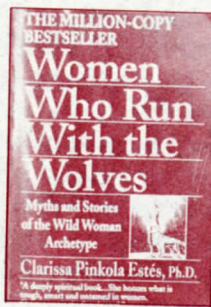
The statement sounds blasphemous, but look again at the crucifixion story. Why would a father send his child to torture for sins not of his own making? Why would a father refuse to save his son, even when he has the power to do so? Why did God need the catastrophe of his son's death to become close to his creation and join in their suffering? *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse* answers these questions, and more.

One of the book's strong points is that it goes beyond critiquing what exists to suggesting new ways forward, both within and outside the christian tradition. Mary Hunt's biting, beautiful "Theological Pornography: From Corporate to Communal Ethics" talks of the dominant theology that objectifies persons, trivializes sexuality and leads to violence. She calls this theological pornography, and suggests in its stead a model for 'theological erotica,' where agency, inclusivity and diversity are honored. Others talk of reclaiming the child as divine, a real image within the gospels, and replacing the glorification of suffering with a commitment to living.

Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse is a powerful book, and a necessary one. The christian ideology, replete with "benevolent" (and not-so-benevolent) abuse, as well as the sanctification of suffering, undergirds many cultures. By understanding this, we may also understand much of the injustice in society. Then it may not be surprising that a man like Sanchez can torture and destroy a human sacrifice given by "children" who wish to please him, and remain confident of his own faith. He is imitating the central story of conventional christianity.

THE ART OF REDISCOVERING ONE'S SOUL

by Seann R. Tan



Women Who Run With the Wolves:
Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype
by Clarissa Pinkola Estés
New York: Ballantine Books, 1992

There is an old woman who lives in a hidden place that everyone knows but few have ever seen. She is called by many names: Bone Woman; The Gatherer; and La Loba, Wolf Woman. The sole work of La Loba is collecting bones of desert creatures in danger of being lost to the world. But her specialty is said to be wolves. When she has assembled an entire skeleton, she sits by the fire, raises her arms over the creature and sings out. That is when the skeleton of the wolf begins to flesh out. La Loba sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being, and the wolf creature begins to breathe. As she continues to sing the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up and runs away down the canyon. Somewhere in its running, the wolf is suddenly transformed into a laughing woman, running free toward the horizon.

Through the story of La Loba, we learn to look for the indestructible life force—the bones. This story promises that if we sing the deep song, if we howl with our soul-voice, we can call up the psychic remains of the Wild Woman soul and sing her into vital shape again.

Women Who Run With the Wolves is a treasure trove of powerful healing stories—myths and folk tales and fairy tales from different parts of the world. A *cantadora* (storyteller) and Jungian analyst, Estés unravels the threads of each story, mines its potent images for nuggets of deep knowing for women who longing to return to their instinctual self. Her insightful interpretations inspire, instruct and empower women to be true to their own nature, and to reconnect with their fount of creativity, intuition, laughter, passion and strength.