

Rape and the Liberating Aftermath

Challenges to a Diaconal Church

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Oslo, 06 June, 2010

Eli Skimmeland

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background, Relevance, Importance and Motivation

The starting point of this paper was at a course about sexual abuse at the Norwegian Church's Resource Center for Sexually Abused that I attended in connection with my studies in diaconal work. Their vision is to promote and support the individual's right to truth, dignity and freedom in their own lives. They want to emerge with the necessary action and clear signs that the church fights against abuse and violations.¹

The important work they are doing for such a vulnerable group in our society, and the honesty and sincerity of the workers at the Center inspired me to write this thesis.

I found that the theology they were using was similar to what my understanding of liberation theology was, and this awoke my interest in how specifically this branch of theology seemed to be a fruitful resource for victims of rape.

What I found especially fascinating at the Resource Center was their ability to talk down to earth and real about such a gruesome topic. Theology is a discipline that is often distanced to people's actual reality. The honesty and sincerity among the workers at the Resource Center struck me as highly important in the work that they are doing. The church must speak the truth about life and human experience – just as it is. If theology is going to be a true source to people's worldview and understanding of life, the difficult parts of reality must be included. Traditionally the church has been important in the work with suffering, such as sickness and death. However there must be room for all kinds of sufferings, even for the increasing group of sexually abused people in our society. The annual report of the Resource Center states that they are not receiving sufficient funding. This tells me that it is still a way to go for our church in the work with sexually abused. This work needs to be included even more in the diaconal work of the church, and it must contribute to liberation and healing of the victims.

1.2 Research Question(s)

The Norwegian government's figures on the amount of rape are horrible. The amount of rapes seems to increase every year. Most women who experience rape struggle with the aftermath.

¹ <http://www.kirkens-ressurscenter.no/>

Sexual violence provokes spiritual as well as physical and mental crises. This is a huge problem in our society, and it is important that the church take it seriously. The church must be competent to meet this group, in the same way they are meeting other vulnerable groups such as victims of sickness and death. Diakonia has often been low-key, characterized by the close, personal encounter with another person. But sometimes it is important and also appropriate that we raise our voices; to go to the barricades to speak out about and protest against injustice. The people of diakonia must dare to be advocates for the victims of rape. Liberation theology has a strong focus exactly on this way of being a diaconal church, and there are many ways this theology can be a strength and a resource in diaconal work with victims of rape.

The overarching question that will guide this research is: “How can feminist liberation theology be a resource in diaconal work with victims of rape?”

I have broken down the main research question into more precise sub-questions such as: What is rape? What are the aftermaths of rape, both short-term and long-term? What is normal treatment for women who has experienced rape? What is liberation theology? What is feminist theology, and feminist liberation theology? In a diaconal setting, can feminist liberation theology be a resource in the work for recovery and in the healing process after rape?

1.3 Literature

In chapter two and three I have used Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath, Violence and the remaking of a self*, as a source to empirical material on rape. She has personal experience on the subject, and she describes vividly about her experience of personal trauma and her recovery. Judith Lewis Herman’s book *Trauma and recovery*, is considered a classic on the subject. It has contributed to a change in the way we think about and treat traumatic events and trauma victims. Her book has been useful in both chapter two and three. In my chapter about liberation theology, Curt Cadorette, Marie Giblin and Marilyn J. Legge’s book *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*, has been a good resource to basic understanding of liberation theology. Letty Russel’s book *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective* became one the main books I have used in both chapter four and five. Chapter five presents feminist theology, and Rosemary Radford Ruether’s book *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power*, has been one of my main sources in

addition to Russel's book. In chapter six, the chapter where I try to sum up my findings, I have found the Norwegian book *Fra skam til verdighet*, edited by Elisabeth Torp, to be of great use.

1.4 Choice of method

Don Browning: Practice - theory - practice

The traditional understanding is that practical theology is "applied theology", this presupposed a deductive approach. According to Olav Skjevesland this may be relevant in a context where the church practice takes place in relatively homogeneous and transparent conditions. In the 1990s the model "practice - theory - practice" was launched, this model is more relevant in a pluralistic culture. The starting point is a critical analysis of established religious practices in a given field of action. The practice is confronted with a verification of biblical material and tradition. A reflection that combines these two aspects leads to the presentation of a new and better practice.

I have chosen to look at already existing written material on rape, the aftermath of rape, and treatment, including empirically written material from survivors of rape. I found that much of the traditional theology is an extra burden for victims of rape, and continued with a starting point that liberation theology could be a resource in the diaconal work with victims of rape. So I looked into this theology, and found that it is resourceful in several different ways.

Finally I suggest a new practice, where the benefits from liberation theology are applied.

Don S. Browning is a key representative of this model. He launched a "fundamental practical theology", also understood as a strategic practical theology.² This is carried through in four steps:

- The *descriptive* theology that aims to describe the current practice, the description raises the question that leads to theological reflection.
- The *historical* theology asks what the normative texts imply when we approach them openly and honestly.
- The *systematic* theology reflects the "horizon of fusion" between the vision inherent in current practice and the vision found in the normative texts.
- The "*strategic*" practical theology includes what we traditionally consider to be practical theology, but it is also the conclusion of a theological process that is practical from beginning to end - it is therefore fundamentally practical.³

² O. Skjevesland (1999), *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi*, p. 56

³ *Ibid.*, p 57

The conclusions of strategic practical theology will necessarily affect the whole hermeneutic circle. The practice that comes from the strategic practical theology will generate new questions that start the hermeneutical circle again. Our current practices will always only be "secure" in a period of time before they meet new crises that will ask new questions, which in turn takes us through the hermeneutic circle.

The theoretical framework for diaconal science must be interdisciplinary. This implies a rejection of the idea that a particular theory or discipline may have hegemony, and dialectic between the different academic traditions must be developed. This means that it is a goal to have an open epistemology, in which different knowledge systems are linked together in dialogue.⁴ Latin American Liberation theologians criticized the deductive method because it deduces "timeless" principles or traditional concepts that have already been classified and incorporated in the "official" theology; through this one tends to stand out as idealistic and self-affirming, internal and irrelevant. Liberation Theology therefore chooses an inductive method. This allows for a more creative and critical dialectic between practice and theory. The theory must begin as a critical reflection on practice. By "practice" it is meant "the Christian practices that are present in history." It must be critical, if it is not it becomes limited to apologetic confirmation of what is already being done.⁵

1.5. Outline

A short overview of the thesis:

Chapter one presents the background of how I ended up writing this thesis and my motivation. It presents the method I have used which is a simple version of Don Browning's Practice - theory – practice. Chapter two is dealing with what rape is, and what common aftermath of rape is. In chapter three common treatments of victims of rape are presented, and how coping and healing can be achieved. Chapter four is aiming at giving an introduction to liberation theology. Feminist liberation theology is presented in chapter five. Finally the last chapter summarizes what I have found in liberation theology and feminist liberation theology that can be a fruitful resource in the work with victims of rape, and presents an outlook on the present situation in the diaconal work with victims of rape.

⁴ D. Browning (1987), *A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and strategic proposals. Part One and Part Four*

⁵ K. Nordstokke (1999), *Diakonivitenskapens teoretiske ramme*, p. 7

CHAPTER TWO

RAPE AND THE AFTERMATH

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will contain a theoretical consideration concerning what rape is, as well as theories on how normal reactions to a rape are. A traumatic event, such as rape, might also lead to mental health problems, such as PTSD, this will be elaborated. I am using some earlier empirical research concerning the psycho-social consequences of rape, as well as examples from individual stories, and general theory around trauma and rape, and the aftermath.

2.2 Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is, first and foremost, an act of violence, hatred, and aggression. Whether it is viewed clinically or legally, objectively or subjectively, violence is the common denominator. The injuries may be psychological or physical, in acts of sexual violence; it is usually both. Experience has become the primary source of comprehending sexual violence. Fortune writes: “Those who have been raped have walked through “the valley of the shadow of death” and “most has returned to tell about it”⁶. Whether or not physical violence was inflicted, the most common reaction of a victim is “I thought I was going to be killed,” The victim is overwhelmed and overpowered by both the physical strength and the hatred of the rapist.⁷ On one hand, the sexual nature of sexual violence is irrelevant. Violence is violence no matter what form it takes. The body is insulted, injury occurs, and there is the experience of physical and emotional pain. And yet the sexual aspect of violence is relevant. The nature of the assault makes clear the totality of the violation of the person. During the attack, the victim is not only out of control of her (I will use ‘her/she’, in the rest of the paper, since it is mainly women who experience rape) situation, but the victim is also assaulted in the most vulnerable dimension of the self. A sexual attack makes it clear that something has been taken away. The power to decide, to choose, to determine, to consent or withhold consent in the most concrete bodily dimension, all this vanishes in the face of a rapist. Marie Fortune states that being forced sexually against one’s will is the ultimate experience of powerlessness, short of death.⁸

2.3 Definition of Rape

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines rape as:

⁶ M. Fortune (1983), *Sexual Violence, The Unmentionable Sin – an ethical and pastoral perspective*, p. 5

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7

- an act or instance of robbing or despoiling or carrying away a person by force
- unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent — compare sexual assault, statutory rape
- an outrageous violation

2.3.1 Legal Definition of Rape

In the Norwegian legal system, rape has been forbidden by law for the last thousand years (as long as we have knowledge of a written law in Norway; (Gulatingsloven). In the present law of 1902 (revised several times after this) the law on sexual offences is placed under crimes against moral conduct. The present law is gender neutral, in relation to both offender and victim.

Paragraph 192:

A person who by violence or by inducing fear for anybody's life or health forces someone to unlawful sexual relations or assists in such, should be punished for rape with up to 10 years' imprisonment, but with at least one year if the unlawful sexual relation was intercourse.⁹

Penetration is not seen as a condition for rape in the present Norwegian law. Paragraph 193 discusses unlawful sexual relations with an unconscious person, or someone who for other reasons, e.g. physical illness, cannot offer resistance. To take advantage of someone's mental

⁹ § 192. Den som

a) skaffer seg seksuell omgang ved vold eller ved truende atferd, eller b) har seksuell omgang med noen som er bevisstløs eller av andre grunner ute av stand til å motsette seg handlingen, eller c) ved vold eller ved truende atferd får noen til å ha seksuell omgang med en annen, eller til å utføre tilsvarende handlinger med seg selv, straffes for voldtekt med fengsel inntil 10 år. Ved vurderingen av om det er utøvd vold eller truende atferd eller om fornærmede var ute av stand til å motsette seg handlingen, skal det legges vekt på om fornærmede var under 14 år. Straffen er fengsel i minst 2 år dersom a) den seksuelle omgang var samleie, eller b) den skyldige har fremkalt en tilstand som nevnt i første ledd bokstav b for å oppnå seksuell omgang. Fengsel inntil 21 år kan idømmes dersom a) voldtekten er begått av flere i fellesskap, b) voldtekten er begått på en særlig smertefull eller særlig krenkende måte, c) den skyldige tidligere er straffet etter denne bestemmelsen eller etter § 195, eller d) den fornærmede som følge av handlingen dør eller får betydelig skade på legeme eller helse. Seksuelt overførbart sykdom og allmennfarlig smittsom sykdom, jf. smittevernloven § 1-3 nr. 3 jf. nr. 1, regnes alltid som betydelig skade på legeme eller helse etter denne paragrafen.

Den som ved grov uaktsomhet gjør seg skyldig i voldtekt etter første ledd, straffes med fengsel inntil 5 år. Foreligger omstendigheter som nevnt i tredje ledd, er straffen fengsel inntil 8 år. (<http://www.lovdatabasen.no/all/tl-19020522-010-023.html>)

illness or mental retardation is also included in this paragraph.¹⁰ Paragraph 194 discusses unlawful sexual relations attained by threats, cunning behavior or abuse of dependency.¹¹ Paragraph 193 and 194 are not, however, seen as rape legally. The Norwegian law is on one hand narrow in its definition of rape, by its emphasis on the use of force, and on the other hand broad in not demanding penetration and in being gender neutral.

2.3.2 Rape, a Confusing Matter

The definition of rape may seem clear, however the question of what rape is is not an entirely easy matter. The issue can be confusing for several reasons:

- It is linked to issues of male domination in general and in sexual relations in particular.
- It is linked to understanding the general effects of sexual assault on all women's development and behavior.
- It is linked to an understanding of human destructiveness, cultural attitudes concerning violence and how people deal with the unpleasant knowledge of this destructiveness by blaming the victim.
- It is linked to an understanding of the connection between sex and violence and the eroticization of both power and violence and of subordination.¹²

Male domination in the sexual sphere is connected to men's potential for physical dominance, and to the cultural beliefs and attitudes concerning sexual relations. Traditionally, men have been the possessors of desire, woman have been regarded the objects of men's desire, as passive receivers, who are expected to signal willingness, and by this they are easy targets for

¹⁰ § 193. Den som skaffer seg eller en annen seksuell omgang ved misbruk av stilling, avhengighetsforhold eller tillitsforhold, straffes med fengsel inntil 5 år. På samme måte straffes den som skaffer seg eller en annen seksuell omgang ved å utnytte noens psykiske lidelse eller psykiske utviklingshemming. (<http://www.lovdato.no/all/tl-19020522-010-023.html>)

¹¹ § 194. Den som har seksuell omgang med noen som er innsatt eller plassert i anstalt eller institusjon under kriminalomsorgen eller politiet eller i institusjon under barnevernet, og som der står under vedkommendes myndighet eller oppsikt, straffes med fengsel inntil 5 år. På samme måte straffes den som skaffer en annen seksuell omgang med noen som han selv står i et slikt forhold til. (<http://www.lovdato.no/all/tl-19020522-010-023.html>)

¹² S. Dahl (1993), Rape – A Hazard to Health, p. 2

projective interpretation. Sayings like "When a woman says no, she means yes" are a part of confusing the picture.¹³ Aggression in relations between the sexes does not represent aggression between equal partners, but is connected to men's potential for physical dominance. The knowledge of this and the threat of bodily violation may influence women's socialization. Solutions to this can be to seek a male protector, or to deny or control the danger by treating men as equals, by trustfully subordinating, or by seeking influence over them through erotic power. When these counteractions fails, the woman appears naive and her failed strategy might lead to a breakdown in her construction of reality, and lead to chaos and confusion in her understanding of the world. Research has shown that the fear of violence and rape has a restricting effect on women's behavior. Historically, rape has been illegal when it came to stealing another man's property, but legal as the husbands right to possess and control his wife's body.¹⁴

Andenæs, a leading Norwegian professor of law, claimed that the aim of rape is primarily satisfaction of an "in itself normal drive". Research on offenders does not confirm that this "normal drive" is a simple sexual drive. Groth, who conducted a study of convicted rapists, states: "Rape is a Pseudo sexual Act, a pattern of sexual behavior that is concerned much more with status, hostility, control and dominance than with sensual pleasure or sexual satisfaction."¹⁵ Solveig Dahl argues this and states that to say that rape is not sexuality is also confusing since sexual behavior is so strongly involved. One has to take into account that violence, power and subordination can be eroticized and acted out in sexual behavior to the extent that vital and mutual rules for human interaction are violated.¹⁶

My intention of pointing out the confusion of the issue of rape is to focus on the difficulty of assessing and interpreting the meaning of the traumatic event. It does not exist a single theory which can explain completely what rape does psychologically to a woman.

2.4 Blame

The blaming of a victim is a complex phenomenon; it may consist of elements like contempt for the weak, a need to believe in a just world, and a defense against a realization that we may

¹³ Dahl (1993), p. 3

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4

¹⁵ Quoted in Dahl (1993), p. 4

¹⁶ Dahl (1993), p. 4

all become victims. By blaming the victim and focusing on what is wrong with her, the illusion of invulnerability can be maintained. This tendency is relevant not only to rape, but in relation to all victims of violence.¹⁷

Susan J. Brison, Professor of Philosophy at Dartmouth College states in her book *Aftermath, Violence and the remaking of a self* that those who haven't been sexually violated themselves may have difficulty understanding why women who survive assault often blame themselves, and this may wrongly attribute it to a sex-linked trait of masochism or a lack of self-esteem. What they do not know that it can be less painful to believe that you did something blameworthy than it is to relate to the fact that you are living in a world where you can be attacked at any time, in any place, simply because you are a woman. It is hard to proceed after an attack that is both random – and thus also completely unpredictable – and not random, that is in fact, a crime of hatred directed toward the group to which you happen to belong to. Brison says: “If I hadn't been the one who was attacked on that road in France, it would have been the next woman to come along. But had my husband walked down that road instead, he would have been safe.”¹⁸ Susan J. Brison was herself attacked from behind, severely beaten, sexually assaulted, strangled to unconsciousness, and left for dead. She survived, but her world was utterly destroyed. Her training as a philosopher could not help her make sense of things, and many of her fundamental assumptions about the nature of the self and the world it inhabits were shattered. In her book she examines the undoing and remaking of a self in the aftermath of violence. Her book *Aftermath* is an affecting and spirited record of how she managed, with great difficulty, to put her life back together.

2.5 Different Types of Rape

The nature of the rape situation itself is significant to the aftermath, and in shaping a helpful counseling response. Rape experiences generally fall into two broad categories. Marie Fortune quotes Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, *Rape: Victims of Crisis*, and calls them: Blitz rape and confidence rape.

Blitz rape: This is the sudden, surprise attack by a stranger or strangers. It is totally unexpected; the rape shatters the victim's sense of trust in her environment. The victim may feel that she was in the wrong place at the wrong time and she is unable to make sense out of

¹⁷ Dahl (1993), p. 4

¹⁸ S. Brison (2002), *Aftermath, violence and the remaking of a self*, p. 13

what happened to her. The blitz rape may occur outside or inside. In either case, the victim is taken by surprise. The victim feels betrayed by her environment which she once trusted. The world is no longer a safe and hospitable place.

Confidence rape: This involves a rapist and a victim who have had some degree of contact before the assault. The degree of previous contact varies from a new acquaintance, friend or family member or an authority figure like an employer, doctor, teacher etc.¹⁹

In addition to the blitz and confidence rape situations, where it is assumed that the victim was capable of expressing an unwillingness to have sexual contact, some rapes occur when a victim is unable to express lack of approval to sexual contact. This could occur in a blitz or in a confidence situation. Sexual contact without expressed unwillingness often involves children who, due to their lack of maturity and awareness, are unable to freely choose or resist sexual contact. Likewise, adult may be unable to resist unwanted sexual contact if they are developmentally disabled, intoxicated, or drugged.²⁰

2.6 Statistics

In January 2008 a Norwegian government-appointed committee presented a report on rape issues in Norway. It is estimated that between 8000 and 16.000 are raped or attempted raped every year in Norway. In 2006 it was reported 974 rapes and attempted rapes, which implies six to twelve percent of the alleged rape and attempted rape, in addition, it is also the case that only one in ten rapes are reported to the police. This means that about ninety percent of the cases are never even known to the police. It is also known that vulnerable groups, such as prostitutes, immigrants and women very rarely reports assaults. In addition, it is also not certain that you get the help you need by reporting your case to the police. Out of a hundred women that report their case to the police, eighty percent experience that their cases gets dismissed. Less than one percent of the predators receive punishment. The majority of the reported rapes occurred in private residences, and there are only a few of the predators that are completely alien. The fact is that the closer the relationship is, the less likely it is that it is reported.²¹

¹⁹ M. Fortune (1983), p. 142

²⁰ Ibid., p. 143

²¹ R. Karlsen, <http://www.rights.no/publisher/publisher.asp?id=46&tekstid=1450>

4200 sexual offenses were reported in 2009, this is seven percent more than in the previous year. The amount of rapes has also increased, compared with 2008, it was reported almost six percent more cases in 2009.²²

2.7 The Aftermath of Rape

It is not uncommon that a victim does not have any visible reactions right after a rape. Many suppress, deny or trivialize what has happened, simply because it is too hard to grasp what has happened. Descriptions such as: “It was totally unreal”, “I was beside myself”, “it was like a nightmare”, are common. Often it may take some time before the victim can bear to deal with emotions at all, and thereby be able to tell more detailed about the sexual assault. It is also quite common that there are strong emotional outbursts of crying and screaming, aggression and anger, and feelings of anxiety and panic. These are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. All responses are "correct", it is better to react, rather than keeping everything locked inside.²³

All studies of immediate psychological reactions to rape seem to agree on the findings that fear and anxiety is the most prominent responses. The reaction has been described either as crisis reaction or as a classical conditioned response to a life-threatening situation. Some studies have emphasized the depressive reaction. Some studies also confirms that the acute psychological reaction to rape shows the typical symptom pattern of post-traumatic stress reaction with the specific features described in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).²⁴

2.7.1 Trauma and PTSD

A traumatic event can be described as a situation where a person feels utterly helpless facing a force that is perceived to be life-threatening. The immediate psychological responses to such trauma include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation. Long-term effects include the physiological responses of hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep disorders, and more psychological, yet still uncontrolled, responses of depression, inability to concentrate, lack of interest in activities that used to give life meaning, and a sense of foreshortened future. A commonly accepted explanation of these symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is that, in trauma; the ordinarily adaptive human responses to danger that prepare the body to fight or flee are of no avail. “When neither resistance nor escape is

²² Statistisk Sentralbyrå, <http://www.ssb.no/lovbrudda>

²³ G. Kvalheim (2007), *Sjokkfasen*, <http://www.dixi.no/sjokkfasen.77198.no.html>

²⁴ Dahl (1993), p. 71

possible,” Judith Herman explains, “the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over.”²⁵

Post-traumatic stress disorder was included in the diagnostic manual in 1980. It was at first described as “outside the range of human experience.” Judith Herman points out that, sadly, rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence, are so common, that they hardly are experiences that can be described as “outside the range of ordinary experience”. Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they are uncommon, but because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. According to the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, the common denominator of psychological trauma is a feeling of “intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation.”²⁶

The brutality of traumatic events cannot be measured on any single dimension; simplistic efforts to quantify trauma will ultimately lead to meaningless comparisons of horror.

However, certain experiences increase the probability of harm, such as: being taken by surprise, trapped, or exposed to the point of exhaustion. Chances of harm are also increased when the traumatic events include physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death. In each case, the prominent feature of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror. Regular human response to danger is a complex, integrated system of reactions that include both body and mind. Threat initially arouses the sympathetic nervous system, causing the person in danger to feel an adrenaline rush and enter a state of alert. Threat also concentrates a person’s attention on the immediate situation. In addition, threat may also alter ordinary perceptions: people in danger are often able to ignore hunger, exhaustion, or pain. Finally, threat evokes intense feelings of fear and anger. These changes in arousal, attention, perception, and emotion are normal, adaptive reactions. They mobilize the threatened person for challenging action, either in battle or in flight.

Traumatic reactions occur when neither resistance nor escape is possible; the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over. Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in psychological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. The traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without any clear memory of the event, or may remember

²⁵ J. Herman (2001), *Trauma and Recovery - From domestic abuse to political terror*, p. 34

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33

everything in detail but without emotion. She may find herself in a constant state of vigilance and irritability without knowing why. Traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own. This kind of fragmentation, whereby trauma tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions, is central to the historic observations on post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁷

Herman quotes Abram Kardiner that described the essential pathology of the combat neurosis:

When a person is overwhelmed by terror and helplessness, the whole apparatus for concerted, coordinated and purposeful activity is smashed. The perceptions become inaccurate and pervaded with terror, the coordinative functions of judgment and discrimination fail (. . .) the sense organs may even cease to function. (. . .) the aggressive impulses become disorganized and unrelated to the situation in hand. (. . .) The functions of the autonomic nervous system may also become disassociated with the rest of the organism.²⁸

Traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the present.

2.7.2 Symptoms of PTSD

Signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder typically begin within three months of a traumatic event. However, in some cases symptoms may not occur until years after the event. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms can come and go. It is possible to have more extensive post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms during times of higher stress or when experiencing reminders of what happened. A car backfire may for instance lead to reliving of combat experiences. Or seeing a report on the news about a rape may bring back the feeling of the horror and fear of the assault.²⁹ Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms are commonly grouped into three types: *hyperarousal*, *intrusion* and *constriction*.

Hyperarousal, this category reflects the persistent expectation of danger. After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment. In this state the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly.³⁰

Intrusion reflects the unforgettable imprint that the traumatic event leaves. Long after the danger is over, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in

²⁷ J, Herman (2001), p. 34

²⁸ Ibid., p. 35

²⁹ <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/DS00246>

³⁰ J, Herman (2001), p. 36

the present. They are unable to resume the normal course of their lives, because the trauma keeps on interrupting. It is as if time stops at the moment of the traumatic event. Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can evoke memories, which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event.³¹ Traumatic memories are not encoded like ordinary memories of adults in a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story, - traumatic memories have, what Herman calls, “a frozen and wordless quality”, they lack verbal narrative and context; instead, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images. The unusual features of traumatic memory may be based on alterations in the central nervous system.³² The psychiatrist Mardi Horowitz postulates a “completion principle” which “summarizes the human mind’s intrinsic ability to process new information in order to bring up to date the inner schemata of the self and the world.” Trauma, by definition, shatters these “inner schemata.” Horowitz suggests that unassimilated traumatic experiences are stored in a special kind of “active memory,” which has an “intrinsic tendency to repeat the representation of contents.” The trauma is resolved only when the survivor develops a new mental “scheme” for understanding what happened.³³ Reliving a traumatic experience, whether in the form of intrusive memories, dreams, or actions, carries with it the emotional intensity of the original event. These emotions are outside what we call the range of ordinary emotional experience, and they overwhelm the ordinary capacity to bear feelings. Because reliving a traumatic experience provokes such intense emotional distress, a traumatized person will normally try to avoid it. The effort to ward off the intrusive symptoms, though it is self-protective in intent, only further aggravates to post-traumatic syndrome. The attempt to avoid reliving the trauma often results in a narrowing of consciousness, a withdrawal from engagement with others, and an impoverished life.³⁴ The last category; *constriction*, reflects the numbing response of surrender. When a person is feeling completely powerless, and any other form of resistance is useless, she may simply admit defeat. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely. A rape survivor describes her experience of this state of surrender: “Did you ever see a rabbit stuck in the glare of your headlights when you were going down a road at night. Transfixed –like it knew it was going to get it – that’s what happened.”³⁵ Another rape survivor says: “I couldn’t scream. I couldn’t

³¹ J, Herman (2001), p. 37

³² Ibid., p. 38

³³ Ibid., p. 41

³⁴ Ibid., p. 42

³⁵ Ibid.

move. I was paralyzed (. . .) like a rag doll.”³⁶ Sometimes situations of unpreventable danger may bring to mind not only terror and rage but also, paradoxically, a state of detached calmness, in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve. Events continue to register in the awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings.³⁷ Perceptions may be numbed, with partial anesthesia or the loss of particular sensations. Sense of time may be altered, often with a feeling of life passing in slow motion, and the experience may lose its quality of ordinary reality. The person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing it from outside her own body. These perceptual changes combined with a feeling of apathy, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle. Herman states that this can be regarded as nature’s small mercy, a protection against the unbearable pain. It seems clear that traumatized people run a high risk of compounding their difficulties by developing dependence on alcohol or other drugs. The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study reported that 75 percent of men with PTSD developed problems with alcohol abuse or dependence.³⁸ Because dissociative alterations in consciousness or intoxication keep the traumatic experience walled off from ordinary consciousness, they prevent the integration that is necessary for healing.³⁹ In an effort to create some sense of safety and to control their pervasive fear, traumatized people often restrict their lives. Constrictive symptoms also interfere with anticipation and planning for the future.⁴⁰ A study of kidnapped schoolchildren describes how years after the event, the children retained a foreshortened sense of future. When asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, many replied that they never made plans for the future because they expected to die young.⁴¹

Since neither the intrusive nor the numbing symptoms allow for integration of the traumatic event, the alteration between these two extreme states might be understood as an attempt to find a satisfactory balance between the two. But balance is exactly what a traumatized person is lacking. She finds herself caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma. The dialectic of trauma is therefore potentially self-perpetuating. In a large-scale community study of crime victims; rape survivors generally reported that their most severe intrusive

³⁶ J, Herman (2001), p. 42

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 44

³⁹ Ibid., p. 45

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 46

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 47

symptoms diminished after three to six months, but many of them were still fearful and anxious one year following the rape.⁴² Another study of rape survivors also found that the majority still was complaining of intrusive fear at the one-year mark. When a different group of rape survivors were contacted two to three years after they had first been seen in a hospital emergency room, the majority were still suffering from symptoms attributable to the rape. The traumatic injury persists over even a longer period of time. For example, four to six years after their study of rape victims at a hospital emergency room, Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom contacted the women again, by this time, three-fourths of the women considered themselves recovered. In retrospect, about one-third thought it had taken them less than a year to recover, and one-third felt it had taken more than a year. But one in four felt that she still had not recovered.⁴³ While specific trauma-related symptoms seem to fade over time, they can be revitalized, even years after the event, by reminders of the original trauma. As intrusive symptoms diminish, numbing or constrictive symptoms come to predominate. The traumatized person may no longer seem scared and may resume the outward forms of her previous life, but the severing of normal events from their ordinary meanings and the distortion in the sense of reality persist. She may complain that she is just going through the motions of living, as if she were observing it from a distance. Long after the event, many traumatized people feel that a part of themselves has died. The most profoundly afflicted wish that they were dead. The most disturbing information on the long-term effects of traumatic events comes from a community study of crime victims, including 100 women who had been raped; the average time elapsed since the rape was nine years and the study recorded only major mental health problems. Even by these crude measures, the lasting destructive effects of the trauma were apparent. Rape survivors reported more “nervous breakdowns,” more suicidal thoughts, and more suicide attempts than any other group. While prior to the rape they had been no more likely than anyone else to attempt suicide, almost one in five made a suicide attempt following the rape.⁴⁴

⁴² J, Herman (2001), p. 47

⁴³ Ibid., p. 48

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 50

CHAPTER THREE

TREATMENT COPING HEALING

3.1 Introduction

Many of the theories presented in this chapter may seem as basic human understanding, none the less, they are crucial in the meeting with someone who has experienced sexual violence. And many of them, though seemingly logical and simple are extremely important in the meeting. In this chapter I am presenting theories around diaconal work, pastoral care, and simple fellow human being interaction with victims of rape. I am also presenting some psychological work with victims of trauma and rape that require psychological education and a special interest in the work with traumatized people.

It is important to emphasize that there is not only one way to react after a rape. There are as many reactions as there are women who experience it. This means that there is no such thing as one good way to meet everyone. However, many women experience similar reactions. There are numerous and relatively large individual differences, the following chapter describe some ways of helping a victim of rape.

As diaconal workers, it is important to be aware of the reactions to rape that are presented in chapter two. The simple awareness of these reactions makes one able to normalize the aftermath of rape. Many victims of rape tell that when they were told that their reactions were normal; this was the first important step to healing.

It has become common to hear people say the most important thing after experiencing a difficult situation is good support from family and friends. We hear this from professionals, politicians and others. This is often correct, but unfortunately there are many events that are too difficult to talk about with friends and family. Norwegian psychologist Atle Dyregrov stresses in his article *Voldtekt - Hvordan kan du hjelpe?* that after someone has experienced a rape, it is particularly difficult to know what to say or do to help. Many people are afraid to say the wrong things, being misunderstood or make matters worse. This is why many pulls away, says little, or fail to mention what has happened, that is if the person who was subject to rape has even dared to tell about it. If this is the case the victim can easily feel betrayed by their surroundings, such as close family, friends and work colleagues. The interaction between the person who has experienced such a dramatic event and the environment has potential to become problematic. This is because sexual abuse is still somewhat a taboo in our society,

and the topic is surrounded with secrecy and old notions of the victims being partially responsible. Dyregrov says that through many years of work in this area, we know that many victims emphasize their social networks as being a very important aspect in the help they received. At the same time many stress that they have missed support from family, friends, workplace or school.⁴⁵

3.2 Recovery

The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery is therefore based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can only take place within the context of relationships, it cannot occur in isolation. In her renewed connections with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. Just as these capabilities are originally formed in relationships with other people, they must be reformed in such relationships.⁴⁶

According to Herman recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life. Like any abstract concept, these stages of recovery are a convenient fiction, and not to be taken too literally. The process is turbulent and complex, this division is an attempt to impose simplicity and order. However, in the course of a successful recovery, it should be possible to recognize a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatized isolation to restored social connection.⁴⁷

Chapter two described the symptoms of PTSD; the intention of this chapter is not to give an in-depth description of the treatment of this psychological diagnosis. I will describe shortly some of the methods that are being used. PTSD diagnosed people need help from professional psychologist trained in the specific methods for this type of psychological treatment. In diaconal work and in fellow human being interaction with victims of rape it is beneficial to be aware of symptoms of PTSD in order to know when one should help someone get help from a

⁴⁵ A. Dyregrov (2007), Voldtekt- Hvordan kan du hjelpe?
http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/bld/tema/vold_i_nare_relasjoner/voldtekt---hvordan-kan-du-hjelpe.html?id=465268

⁴⁶ J, Herman (2001), p. 133

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 155

trained psychologist in the specific methods for treatment of PTSD. In order to get the diagnosis there are several components that must be evident with the patient. Many victims of rape are ‘only’ suffering from some of them; in these cases diaconal workers must have knowledge about the common reactions. Marie Fortune emphasizes that to fulfill the pastoral role with rape victims; one must understand fully the nature of rape, its impact on the victim, and the healing process.

3.2.1 Treatment PTSD

Trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy: Cognitive-behavioral therapy for PTSD and trauma involves carefully and gradually “exposing” yourself to thoughts, feelings, and situations that remind you of the trauma. Therapy also involves identifying upsetting thoughts about the traumatic event—particularly thoughts that are distorted and irrational—and replacing them with a more balanced picture.

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) – EMDR incorporates elements of cognitive-behavioral therapy with eye movements or other forms of rhythmic, left-right stimulation, such as hand taps or sounds. Eye movements and other bilateral forms of stimulation are thought to work by “unfreezing” the brain’s information processing system, which is interrupted in times of extreme stress, leaving only frozen emotional fragments which retain their original intensity. Once EMDR frees these fragments of the trauma, they can be integrated into a cohesive memory and processed.

Family therapy: Since PTSD affects both the victim and those close to her, family therapy can be especially productive. Family therapy can help the family to understand what the victim is going through. It can also help everyone in the family communicate better and work through relationship problems.

Medication: Medication is sometimes prescribed to people with PTSD to relieve secondary symptoms of depression or anxiety, but it does not treat the causes of PTSD.⁴⁸

3.2.2 What is needed to Provide Help and Support?

⁴⁸ Helpguide.org. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder - Symptoms, Treatment, and Self-Help. http://helpguide.org/mental/post_traumatic_stress_disorder_symptoms_treatment.htm

This section is directed toward fellow human being interaction with victims of rape. There are several important prerequisites that are needed in order to provide assistance to those who experience such an event. It requires that you have some knowledge of normal reactions and that you know how you can support or help. It is important that you can pick up signals from the affected, so you know that your help or your attempts to help are not an extra burden for the victim. Help must always be given on the premises of the victim. Help may be well intended but meaningless if it does not match what the person wants, the needs she has and how she perceives what you do. To make sure that your help is good it is important to communicate about the communication.

To dare to be present without many words may be the best support early after a rape. Meanwhile, your attention and interest over time is more important than that you are there a lot right after the incident. No one reacts the same way, and that means someone already within the first month will do well and are able to express it. You should respect what the victim says, and not press on to talk about the incident if she does not want to. If it is obvious that it is not going well with her it can become necessary to push a little for her to seek more help or talk to you about the incident. It may be difficult to handle that the one you are trying to help does not want your support and assistance. However, there are many reasons why someone might deny support and assistance:

- She may have too many that want to help at once
- She is feeling so low that she does not have the energy to receive help
- She is so angry, or otherwise emotionally eliminated, she does not want her loved ones to see her like this
- She may have lost the trust of others and might be skeptical of whether you wish her well or not
- She feels that others cannot possibly understand what she is going through.⁴⁹

The process of recovery from the rape begins immediately. The most important thing in shaping that recovery is the response which a rape victim receives from family, friends, the Church, and the community. If she feels comfortable in sharing what happened with those around her and finds a sensitive and caring response, then the recovery process proceeds. If, for any reason, the victim cannot share the experience and seek support from such resources,

⁴⁹ A. Dyregrov (2007), Voldtekt- Hvordan kan du hjelpe?
http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/bld/tema/vold_i_nare_relasjoner/voldtekt---hvordan-kan-du-hjelpe.html?id=465268

then the recovery may be long and painful; the negative impact of the rape is maximized by the victim's isolation.⁵⁰

Support and understanding from family, friends, or helpers enables the rape victim to utilize her own strength to move through recovery and to discover new strengths and learning's which result in growth and change. It is through the recovery process that victims become survivors, and are no longer victimized by the rape experience. *Without* supportive responses from family, friends, and community, all too often victims remain victims.

Some victims may have unrealistic expectations to the people around them. They may want a rape crisis worker to take care of everything (police interview, medical appointments, etc.) or a clergyperson to make it all better, or a friend to "solve" all their problems by rescuing them. These expectations are understandable but are not in the best interest of the victim. Those who are trying to help need to be realistic about what they can provide: time to listen, genuine caring, information, advocacy, support. They also need to be careful not to be pulled into rescuing the victim. Rescuing perpetuates the victimization by treating the victim as helpless and ignoring the person's inner strength. The goal is not to rescue but to assist the victim in moving through the crisis to become a survivor.⁵¹

3.2.3 Rape as Crisis

A crisis is defined as an externally imposed event that creates a situation beyond a person's normal coping threshold which requires problem solving abilities beyond that person's capacity at that particular time. It presents a person with a situation in which the person feels powerless, overwhelmed, and out-of-control of her life. Unlike victims of other crisis, many rape victims hesitate to approach primary resources for help because of fear of being rejected or not believed or being blamed for the attack. Thus, they are more likely to utilize secondary or tertiary helpers first. Regardless of whom they approach – clergy, police, medical personnel, family, or friends – *it is strongly recommended that that person encourage the victim to contact a local rape crisis service to assist with the initial crisis intervention.* The

⁵⁰ M. Fortune (1983), p. 144

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145

specialized counseling and advocacy services available through such agencies are invaluable for the victim.⁵²

Although rape which culminates in the death of the victim is relatively rare, the life-threatening dimension of the experience of rape is very real and quite common. Fear, both during and following the assault, is the most widely reported reaction. In addition, the entire world of the victim has been turned upside down. She has experienced something that she thinks only happens to other people. The world is no longer a hospitable place. Fortune states that “A rape victim’s life will never be the same again”.⁵³ Like other crimes of violence, rape leaves the victim with that sense that “I could have been killed.” The physical, emotional, and spiritual violation is overwhelming. But whether or not that damage becomes permanent depends fundamentally on the response of those around the victim and the process of recovery which she experiences.

Research shows that changes in victim’s relation to self and others are frequent consequences of rape. The changes can be both negative and positive. Negative changes are associated with long-term psychiatric disorders after rape. There is also a significant difference between the psychiatric outcome and no psychiatric outcome group concerning the coping strategies applied by the victims. Mainly avoidance strategies are associated with a psychiatric outcome, whereas an alternation of approach and avoidance strategies or mainly approach strategies are related to recovery. This result has clinical implications and confirms that to avoid talking about the traumatic event, to try to forget or pretend it never happened, should not be supported in the counseling of victims and their network.⁵⁴

3.2.4 Shame

Most women who are exposed to abuse are familiar with the feeling of shame.⁵⁵ Sexual abuse is by far still a difficult topic for most people to talk about, it is also still somewhat of a taboo in our society. Shame reactions are usually always present in conversations with victims of rape.⁵⁶ It is therefore important that professionals are able to provide the right type of

⁵² M. Fortune (1983), p. 146

⁵³ Ibid., p. 143

⁵⁴ S. Dahl (1993), p. 126

⁵⁵ S. Pattison (2000), p. 173

⁵⁶ B. Tofte, M. Parlett (2010) *Opplevelsen av skam ved voldtekt*, (retrieved from <http://www.dixi.no/opplevelsen-av-skam-ved-voldtekt.4669366-139947.html> at June 01)

empathy and understanding. If not, they add a new burden to the rape victim. In short, while rape is a massive intrusion in itself, and often arouses great shame, the subsequent interrogation by the police, lawyers, doctors, etc., sometimes almost feels more traumatic than the actual rape - and they become a "public" invasion and exposure of a "private" experience.⁵⁷

If we understand shame as a result of having been raped, it is important to realize that rape is a crime against the person. In fact, rape victims often feel that they have been assaulted, robbed or poisoned. Those who have been raped and have feelings of shame and self blame need to hear loud and clear, and often numerous times, that it is only the predator who is a criminal, and that the person who was assaulted is not responsible for the rape.

Unfortunately, some victims of rape feel directly or indirectly guilty for what happened to them; being told for instance: "You should not have dressed so challenging," "you should not have been drinking alcohol," and "you should not have gone out alone" increases this feeling.

Sometimes victims of rape experience that their stories are not believed to be accurate, or true at all. This happens often if there is no physical evidence. The statistics in chapter two shows that this is often the case. These brutal misconceptions and misunderstandings, seems to transfer responsibility from the criminal to the abused person, this increases the feeling of shame. Shame usually always has a component of self-criticism. Instead of directing aggression towards the attacker, because of shame, - many are blaming themselves for what happened. It is therefore important that all who treat rape cases are aware of their attitudes when it comes to the question about responsibility and guilt. In Norway rape is prohibited and criminalized. And that applies no matter how the victim of rape has behaved in the situation!⁵⁸

3.2.5 Living with Shame

An ashamed person wants to hide what has happened to them, this is in contradiction with the natural human reaction - which is to open up for others when they suffer. Research shows that those who have managed to talk through the experience of being raped find this healing in itself. It is crucial that the victim of rape experiences sympathy, understanding and kindness,

⁵⁷ B. Tofte, M. Parlett (2010) *Opplevelsen av skam ved voldtekt*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

and no disruptive or insensitive questioning. An important part of therapy is that the victim of rape experiences the following: accept, empathy, to be seen, heard, and understood. This is also the safest way to integrate and manage the trauma. To be accepted as a normal person - as someone who has normal reactions to an abnormal event – is the beginning of healing, and this also reduces the feelings of shame, isolation and self-blame.⁵⁹

A raped woman (who knew that a rapist in her social network) describes her experience:

In the beginning I was in shock. I was completely disoriented and confused. I felt terrible, I blamed myself for having taken a drink, I felt dirty and I felt disgust for myself. I hated myself, I was terribly ashamed, and I could not talk about the rape to any of my friends who knew him - I did not think they would understand. I did not know what to do and just wanted to die, or go to live in a place where nobody knew me or could remind me of what had happened. It was through talking about my experiences to others who had been raped and hear their experiences - and how they had felt the same way, that I began to accept what had happened to me. I stopped feeling "contaminated" and permanently damaged. I realized that I was not responsible, that I had not chosen it, and that he was a criminal, not me. (...) Being able to talk openly about what had happened - and talk about the details - made it possible to move on and not feel ashamed and alone with it all.⁶⁰

Sharing and talking with others is a way to cure the shame and fear. Talking to others who have experienced the same thing seems to be especially valuable for victims of rape. To meet people who have experienced something similar and that are not pushing them to go faster into the integration of their experiences than what they are ready for. Also not to be treated as a patient, being together with them, without condemnation, while they work through their different thoughts / feelings / physical reactions as they occur, seems to be of great value to victims of rape. Because of this many centers for rape victims use group therapy.

3.2.6 Independent Work with Shame

Aftermath of a rape does not happen immediately - for some it takes a long time before they are able to come to terms with what happened to them, remember and re-tell, - let alone confront the perpetrator. Each person and each situation is unique, and each person reacts to rape individually. A part of the healing process is acknowledging how the feeling of shame

⁵⁹ B. Tofte, M. Parlett (2010) *Opplevelsen av skam ved voldtekt*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (my translation)

can get in the way of living life fully. An important step is to recognize that the feelings of shame are common in relation to having been raped – and it is nothing to be ashamed of. An important step is to let go of the feeling of shame for being ashamed. This is the first step on the road to dare to speak about the shame with others.⁶¹

People often have shame, self-criticism, low self-esteem that goes all the way back to their childhood years. These can be reactivated when someone is raped. These old patterns of feeling unworthy, inadequate or unacceptable sometimes require specialist help from a therapist.⁶²

An important step on the way to get out of the shame is to find others that are "safe" and trustworthy to share experiences with - people who will listen and not criticize, and who genuinely cares. Having a network of supportive others can help the rape victim to sort out what has happened, and to distinguish what is rational and what is not rational thought patterns and body reactions (at the same time recognizing that strongly felt reactions and thoughts also are a part of reality and the truth).⁶³

To get rid of shame after a rape may take time. But there are many examples of those who have not only made it, but also gained new insights and gained greater confidence in themselves. Even the most severe traumas and wounds can heal and be made into life experiences that can give life a new depth and meaning - paradoxically enough.

3.3 In the Words of a Survivor

Perhaps it is impossible for us to imagine our own deaths, our existence can feel necessary, bound to continue. But maybe Susan J. Brison's lawyer was right when he told her that she should remember that she is not supposed to be alive. Brison, a survivor of a gruesome rape says: "What if I take that as my starting point? None of us is *supposed* to be alive. We're all here by chance and only for a little while. The wonder is that we've managed, once again, to winter through and that our hearts, in spite of everything, survive."⁶⁴

Brison wonders:

⁶¹ B. Tofte, M. Parlett (2010) Opplevelsen av skam ved voldtekt,(retrieved from <http://www.dixi.no/opplevelsen-av-skam-ved-voldtekt.4669366-139947.html> at June 01)

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ S. Brison (2002), p. 123

Maybe recovery is reestablishing the illusory sense of the permanence of hope, learning how to be, once again, “crazy-human with hope.” As irrational as it is, I want to believe that, just as there is such a thing as irreparable damage, there might be such a thing as irreversible repair. Hope, like despair, can *feel* permanent. But more likely, the entropy of emotional life – governed by some inexorable law of psychodynamics – makes this impossible. Of course, the belief that things can, once and for all, be made right, makes no more sense than the belief (which takes hold of me, on average, once every few months) that everything is totally, irreparably, ruined. But does it make any *less* sense? For me, anyway, the illusion that hope will perch permanently in my heart is psychologically untenable – I just can’t hold that happy thought for more than a day or two. But objectively – whatever that means – it’s just as plausible, just as rational, as my more obdurate belief in psychic entropic doom.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ S. Brison (2002), p. 116

CHAPTER FOUR

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Liberation theology is a diverse movement within the global Christian community. Its unifying principle is a passionate concern for the poor and oppressed, and a commitment to living the gospel in ways that link everyday life with its transcendent foundation: God's love and concern for all human beings.⁶⁶ This chapter is aiming at giving an introduction to liberation theology. The written material on this is complex, and there are many angles to choose from. I will start by introducing the methodology, and then continue to give a brief presentation of the history, and some of the general thoughts.

In short Liberation theology is a movement in Christian theology which understands the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust political, economic, or social conditions. It has been described as an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor's suffering, their struggle and hope, and a critique of society and the Catholic faith and Christianity through the eyes of the poor.

Noted exponents of liberation theology is the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, who wrote one of the movement's most famous books, *A Theology of Liberation* (1971), Leonardo Boff of Brazil, Jon Sobrino of El Salvador, and Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay.

4.2 The Methodology

The principal methodological innovation in liberation theology is seeing theology from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed (socially, politically, etc.). For example Jon Sobrino, argues that the poor are a privileged channel of God's grace. Latin American Liberation theologians criticized the deductive method because it deduces "timeless" principles or traditional concepts that have already been classified and incorporated in the "official" theology; through this one tends to stand out as idealistic and self-affirming, internal and irrelevant. Liberation Theology therefore chooses an inductive method.⁶⁷ It is important to

⁶⁶ C. Cadorette, M. Giblin, M. Legge (eds) (1992), *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*. p. viii

⁶⁷ K. Nordstokke (1999), *Frigjøringssteologi og norsk kontekst*. In *Ung teologi : Teologisk tidsskrift Bind 32, nr 2*. p. 7

stress that liberation theology is a multifaceted movement, and not an established theological system.⁶⁸

4.2.1 Contextual theology

Christian theology is much more than a collection of texts. It is an on-going attempt to understand and respond to God's presence in history. Christian understanding is that revelation is something that takes place in history. We find the meaning of life in the world, not outside it. We find it in our relationship with our fellow peers. Our particular historical context and the material conditions of our lives are of special importance to our process of shaping our self-understanding and our approach to God. Being a man or a woman, rich or poor – is not of no consequence in this process. Liberation theology stresses that revelation is on-going, not static. The core is that Jesus Christ is an all-important revelation of God's presence in history. We as Christians however, live in a changing world. This means that our belief in Jesus as the incarnation of God must be expressed in ways that makes sense in a given historical context.

Christians of today are facing a multifaceted world. Science and technology has produced remarkable material progress, at the same time we have also sprawling slums, the specter of nuclear war, and a possible ecological catastrophe caused by global warming. What does it mean to believe in God in a world where the rich oppress the poor, men denigrate woman, and human beings with white skin consider themselves superior to people of color? What do Christians have to say about these injustices? What is the relationship between their beliefs, their daily lives, and the suffering that afflicts millions of human beings? Liberation theology emphasizes that Christians must relate to their world dialectically, neither condemning nor accepting too quickly. Achieving this balance is a constant task that is crucial to the trustworthiness and continued existence of the Christian community. This requires theology and theologians that articulate faith in an intelligible way.⁶⁹

4.3. The Beginning of Liberation Theology

In the late 1950's several Latin American priests were sent to Europe for training. There they found a theological scene in a state of transition. Theologians like Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Rahner were exploring the relationship between modernity and Christian belief.

⁶⁸ K. Nordstokke (1999), *Frigjøringssteologi og norsk kontekst*. In *Ung teologi : Teologisk tidsskrift* Bind 32, nr 2. p. 58

⁶⁹ C. Cadorette, M. Giblin, M. Legge (eds) (1992), p. 2

Gradually their views gained wide acceptance in the church and influenced the discussion and documents even of the Second Vatican Council itself. A dialogue was going on in Europe between theologians and social theorists. Latin American theologians began to study Marx and Freud as well as Augustine and Aquinas. They returned home with new theological ideas and a solid grasp of sociology, psychology, economics, and political theory – well equipped to respond to Vatican II’s call for a new, socially committed Christian community. This new generation of theologians realized as they came home that their new knowledge had to be translated to fit their own social context. The Latin America they returned to, in the 60’s, had sunk into extraordinary levels of poverty and political violence. As European theologians were working in a continent that was challenged by developed societies’ crises of meaning, Latin American problems had little to do with belief, or the pros and cons of the Enlightenment. The majority of the Latin Americans were Christians, and most of them had never even heard of the Enlightenment. The problem they were facing was that of *dehumanization*. How could anyone even talk about God when millions of human beings had been turned into “non-persons” by economic exploitation and political repression?⁷⁰

The bishops of Latin America assembled in Medellin, Colombia in 1968 to develop a pastoral strategy for implementing Vatican II in their continent. Theologians like Gutiérrez and Segundo were a part of this and the document they issued called for a radical transformation of the Latin American church, along with the sociopolitical structures of the continent. Not long after Medellin Gutiérrez published his book *A theology of Liberation*. In this book he insisted that Christians commit themselves to the liberation of the poor and oppressed. For Gustavo Gutiérrez the poverty and injustice inflicted on millions of women and men in the developing world was a scandal that demanded redress. But liberation entailed more than economic and political justice. He acknowledged also a transcendental or spiritual dimension to the struggle for liberation. He would claim that the social system that deprived people of bread and freedom also deprived them of their God-given dignity. It numbed them to their own worth and beauty. If Christians believed in an incarnate God revealed in history they had to do something about the impoverished people around them. If they did not their talk about God would be meaningless. This resulted in that for the first time in Christian theological history the question of the poor in the developing world became the focal point of discussion. The European debates between conservatives and liberals about modernity were not the real

⁷⁰ C. Cadorette, M. Giblin, M. Legge (eds) (1992), p. 5

issue in Latin America. The question was how impoverished and oppressed people in the developing world fit into Christian community.⁷¹

Liberation theology received its name from Gustavo Gutierrez's book *A Theology of Liberation*. Gutierrez claimed that Latin America's ills were peculiar to that region, and were therefore seldom directly treated by Western theologians. Gutierrez's theology was an attempt to relate the eschatological message of freedom to the sociopolitical reality of Latin Americans. *Liberation theology is an attempt to reflect upon the experience of oppression and our actions for the new creation of a more humane society.*⁷²

The movement towards this theology of liberation had actually begun a decade earlier with the birth of social conscience in the Church. During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Latin American bishops from all regions had met together and resolved to attack the continent's socio-political problems head-on. They maintained that Christian teachings were relevant to life in this world, and that Catholic social thought thus had implications for the restructuring of unjust societies. Gutierrez worked among the poor peoples of Lima. His observations of that time led him to the conclusion that Peruvians had been trapped into a position of poverty and dependence by an oppressive political and economic system. In his opinion, Peruvians would only taste freedom from oppression when the system was destroyed and all distinctions between rich and poor were abolished. This task he saw as the job of the Church and even as the main point of the Christian message.

I discovered three things. I discovered that poverty was a destructive thing, something to be fought against and destroyed, not merely something which was the object of our charity. Secondly, I discovered that poverty was not accidental. The fact that these people are poor and not rich is not just a matter of chance, but the result of a structure. It was a structural question. Thirdly, I discovered that poor people were a social class. When I discovered that poverty was something to be fought against . . . it became crystal clear that in order to serve the poor, one had to move into political action.⁷³

Gutierrez observed that Latin Americans were economically dependent on the rest of the world. He accused North America and Europe in particular of keeping Latin Americans in a position of servitude by exploiting the use of the region's raw materials. Furthermore, he equated the highly visible class inequalities between the rich and the poor to the class struggle

⁷¹ C. Cadorette, M. Giblin, M. Legge (eds) (1992), p. 5

⁷² L. Russell (1974), *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology*, p. 20

⁷³ As quoted in M. Novak (1986), *Will It Liberate?* p. 23

posited by Marx between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Gutierrez's vision for the future was a classless society with no oppression, equality for all peoples, and power distributed among all. He proposed that a revolution based on the Biblical message of liberation would end the dualisms of rich/poor, oppressors/oppressed, bourgeoisie/proletariat. Liberation, the deliverance of the oppressed, therefore became the theme upon which Gutierrez built his theology. He claimed that he had rediscovered the messianic kernel of the gospel which was the very essence of the Biblical message.

The "cantus firmus of the liberating message" of the Bible is the good news of deliverance experienced by the Hebrew people, and the good news of the establishment of God's rulership as experienced by the early followers of Jesus Christ. These acts of deliverance are also the basis of traditioning into the present experience and future hope of those who seek liberation now.⁷⁴

Gutierrez and other liberation theologians claimed that the truth of the Bible was found in its liberating potential, and that this truth was to be enacted by Christians through political and social praxis (action). The end goal of liberation theology was the realization of full economic and social equality and participation of all peoples in a utopian, harmonic and peaceful society. It sought to build a new society, a new humanity, and a new future. Liberation theologians equated freedom from economic, social and political dependence with spiritual wholeness and the salvific promise of God. Gutierrez reasoned:

The liberation of our continent means more than overcoming economic, social, and political dependence. It means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of mankind as a process of the emancipation of man in history. It is to see man in search of a qualitatively different society in which he will be free from all servitude, in which he will be the artisan of his own destiny. It is to seek the building of a new man.⁷⁵

Liberation theology focused on the Biblical message of God's mission to set humans free from bondage. In the light of oppression experienced by Third World people, it sought to communicate the good news of liberation — which it considered as the gospel — in such a way that people could "hear, understand, and accept this message of God's gift of freedom and salvation in their lives."⁷⁶ Liberation theologians claimed that the experience of the oppressed peoples of Latin America provided the axial point for a new Christianity, a new man, and a new future, and that Christianity had just reached its true identity in the

⁷⁴ L. Russell (1974), p. 27

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 104

⁷⁶ L. Russell (1974), p. 104

identification of faith with revolutionary praxis towards the ending of all dualisms.⁷⁷

Liberation theology provided a new model for Biblical theology, hermeneutics, and ultimately, for a revised worldview. Instead of looking at the newspaper through the lens of the Bible, liberation theologians viewed the Bible through the lens of contemporary experience and social events. They said: “This is a new way to do theology, with the newspaper in hand.”⁷⁸

4.4 Why Liberation Theology Today?

We live in a world that is both interconnected and divided. Our world is increasingly globalized. We are witnessing that social and economic barriers, that have divided human beings for centuries, are melting away. The fact that we are developing technical means for achieving a global community can be a source of hope. However, the fact is that we are also living in a world that is still divided. Way too many are still lacking the essentials of life: food, shelter, means of livelihood, and channels for participating in shaping their own future. Discrimination continues to rage on – against women, people of color, and the poor. Our moral sensibilities are offended by the presence of homeless beggars on the streets of Europe, and by the presence of starving children from the third world on our television screens. As Christians, and individual moral beings, we cannot stop asking questions. We cannot accept status quo. We must ask: How can we work to end the injustice and how can we promote a more just and peaceful human community? Christian churches in the western world have struggled with these questions for a long time. But we also have Christian communities among the poor and the oppressed that have joined this reflection. And they are adding a perspective that is different from that of those who share in the benefits of power and prosperity. The viewpoints of these communities can help us encounter God in a new way with profound implications for the way we understand our faith, our worldview, and the way we live our lives. Liberation theology sees the gospel as a powerful source of hope, not only for Christians, but for the world at large.⁷⁹

The influence of liberation theology diminished after liberation theologians using Marxist concepts were admonished by the Roman Curia's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in 1984 and 1986. The Vatican documents criticize certain strains of Liberation Theology for focusing on institutional dimensions of sin to the exclusion of the individual;

⁷⁷ M. Novak (1986), p. 25

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ C. Cadorette, M. Giblin, M. Legge (eds) (1992), p. vii

and for undermining church authority by identifying the church hierarchy as members of the privileged class.

However liberation theology has continued to develop. Today we see branches of this theology in a multiple of areas such as for instance feminist liberation theology. The next chapter will look into this specific branch of liberation theology.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEMINIST THEOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

In the last decades many different feminist theological voices have emerged around the world therefore it is no longer appropriate to speak of feminist theology in the singular.⁸⁰ This chapter will give an overview of the history of feminist theology, and present some of the main themes within it.

Secular feminists initiated the search for the cause of patriarchy and determined it to be biology and its resultant sociological structures. On that basis, they proposed social and political solutions they thought would minimize the biological differences, disassemble societal structures, and eventually overcome traditional destiny of women. Religious feminists also sought to uncover the cause of patriarchy. Mary Daly, an American radical feminist philosopher, academic, and theologian, believed that the theological cause was a wrong view of God and a wrong view regarding revelation. But although Daly had determined the cause of patriarchy in the Church, she had not extensively developed a theology to correct it. Secular feminists had formulated a plan to eliminate patriarchy in society; feminist theologians, therefore, turned their attention towards developing a comprehensive theology of liberation for women that would provide the solution for the Church. They believed that solution would be found in a feminist form of liberation theology.⁸¹

5.2 Feminist Liberation Theology

Two female theologians, Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether began to develop a theology specific to the liberation of women. They based their theology on the liberation theology that was newly introduced in Latin America (described in the previous chapter).

⁸⁰E. Schussler, M Copeland (eds.) (1996), *Feminist Theology in Different Contexts*, p. vii

⁸¹M. Kassian (1992), *The Feminist Gospel*, 50

Feminist theologians saw many parallels between the condition of the Latin American people and the condition of women. Feminist theology was developed out of an experience of oppression in society, just like the Latin American liberation theology, Feminist scholars claimed that the domination of women by men was “the most ancient and persistent form of the subjection of one human being to a permanent status of inferiority because of sex.”⁸²Feminist theologians believed that sex discrimination was the root of all other forms of oppression. Feminists borrowed from Gustavo Gutierrez’s analysis, but they also believed that the key to true liberation was deeper than mere social and political change. According to feminist theologians, the key to world liberation was the liberation of the world’s largest oppressed class namely women. Feminist theologians believed that the liberation of women would induce the end of poverty, racial discrimination, ecological destruction, and war. They argued that it would end all dualisms, usher in a new world order of peace, and witness the birth of a new humanity.⁸³

5.2.1 The Goals of Feminist Liberation Theology

Letty Russell outlines the goals of feminist liberation theology in her book “Human liberation in a feminist perspective – a theology”. According to Russell, the first feminist goal of liberation is freedom. She argues that liberation was the ultimate pursuit and goal of history using Paul’s picture in Romans 8:22-23 (NIV):

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Russell used this text, and the Biblical story of Israel’s exodus from slavery (the same way as the liberation theologians), to advocate the contemporary pursuit of women’s liberation on a personal and social level. Remembering the Biblical story of liberation in the exodus and the resurrection, we can look together at how groaning for freedom, discovery of freedom and horizon of freedom appear to be happening in the experience of women in today’s world.⁸⁴ Although freedom was feminism’s ultimate goal, Russell and other feminist theologians found it difficult to define the term. Generally, they agreed that freedom referred to a feeling

⁸² L. Russell (1974), p. 29

⁸³ M. Kassian (1992), p. 54

⁸⁴ L. Russell (1974), p. 27

of “wholeness,” “autonomy,” or a “world-transcending spirit.”⁸⁵ Ruether summarized the essence of freedom as consisting of “integral personhood.”⁸⁶ Russell explained:

Freedom is a journey with others and for others toward God’s future. Freedom can never be defined once and for all. Freedom defined is freedom no longer, because it always transcends all our definitions or concepts. It can be experienced and celebrated only as it breaks into our lives as new awareness of hope in God’s future, and new confidence in the growing ability to experience and share love with others.⁸⁷

Feminist theologians viewed freedom as a process that rested within the individual. It was realized through experience, yet had an elusive “never totally realized” quality. Russell explained that (...) the promises of liberation, like the promises of God, are not fully known except as they are experienced, and then they always have an “overspill” of longing that points to the next fulfillment.⁸⁸ Russell says that if someone were to ask a woman *what freedom means* to her, there will be variety of answers. For instance: equal pay and employment practices, freedom from sexual exploitation, and degrading use of her body for entertaining and advertising promotion. Or a woman might prefer to answer the question of what freedom means by simply saying that she wants freedom to be herself and to be accepted as herself, a whole human being.⁸⁹ Letty Russell proposed that the experience of Biblical freedom for women led to a new responsibility to serve. Women were being set free for service (diakonia) to others. In sum, Russell viewed liberation as an ongoing process of intervention on behalf of others. According to Russell,

liberation is a long journey. It is a never-ending struggle by people to find out who they are and what they must become. (...) As long as people are oppressed there will be a groaning for freedom, whether in actions of rebellion or in actions to build a new future of justice for all. It is the calling of men and women to stay on that road toward freedom and to keep the freedom rumor going.⁹⁰

Russell’s second goal of liberation was a new communal social ethic. According to Russell, as individuals experienced freedom for themselves, they were called to

participate in the freeing of other oppressed groups. Insofar as we have a small foretaste of God’s gift of freedom, we are also led to see more clearly that this gift is intended by God for all women and men (. . .) our heightened restlessness and longing,

⁸⁵ R. Ruether (1972), p 124

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ L. Russel (1974), p.25

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 26

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ L. Russel (1974), p. 45

brought about by this foretaste, can only direct us toward participating in God's solidarity with humankind.⁹¹

Ruether agreed with Russell. She believed:

(...) development toward a new planetary humanity goes hand in hand with the revolt of every oppressed group, in demands for national, class, racial, and sexual integrity and identity. (Humans) can move closer together only on the basis of each group's self-realization.⁹²

Women are voicing their search for liberation by rejecting oppressive and sexist religious traditions that declare that they are socially, ecclesiastically, and personally inferior because of their sex. They are digging deeper into their traditions, raising questions about the authority of the church "fathers," and searching out the hidden evidence of the contributions of the church "mothers" to the life and mission of the church.⁹³ These women are *feminist* because they advocate changes that will establish political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. Russell states that feminist theology today is, by definition, *liberation theology* because it is concerned with the liberation of all people to become full participants in human society.⁹⁴

Ruether's short version of the second feminist goal of a new communal social ethic is:

We need to build a new cooperative social order out beyond the principles of hierarchy, rule and competitiveness. Starting in the grass-roots local units of human society where psycho-social polarization first began, we must create a living pattern of mutuality between men and women, between parents and children, among people in their social, economic and political relationships, and finally, between mankind and the organic harmonies of nature.⁹⁵

The ultimate goal of liberation that Russell described was "the realization of a new humanity". Feminist theologians had a vision for a new age and a paradisaic renewal of earth and society. They believed that "God with Us" and the "return of Christ" would occur when humanity achieved a reconciliation of soul and body and thereby ushered in a "new creation." Ruether noted that the "revolution of the feminine (...) sought to reclaim spirit for body and body for spirit in a messianic appearing of the body of God."⁹⁶ According to Ruether, the messianic appearing of the body of God would occur when all humans learned to exist together harmoniously, free from the dualisms of oppression. She concluded:

⁹¹ L. Russel (1974), p. 28

⁹² R. Ruether (1972), p. 189

⁹³ L. Russel (1974), pp. 18-19

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 20

⁹⁵ R. Ruether (1972), pp. 124-124

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 126

In its state of mortality and decadence all the universe longs for the fulfillment of God's new creation when all the parts will be born again in harmony, when the New Age promised by God and begun in Jesus Christ will be fulfilled. (...) When the end and goal of this action is completed, Christ will hand himself and all things back to God.⁹⁷

5.2.2 The Theological Solution

Ruether and Russell made Gutierrez's liberation theology into a feminist liberation theology. They accepted his proposal that the liberation of the oppressed was the main message of the Biblical message, but shifted his focus from those who were economically oppressed to those who were oppressed because of their gender. Ruether and Russell argued that the Bible supported the liberation of women. The Bible pointed toward the freedom and integral personhood of women. They advocated a new communal social ethic in which those who had already experienced freedom would struggle on behalf of other groups who had not yet experienced it. Ruether and Russell believed that the Kingdom of God would be realized when people achieved a new planetary humanity by harmonizing all dualisms. Ruether and Russell believed that a feminist liberation theology, which viewed liberation as the main message of the Bible, was the theological solution for the liberation and equality of women. Secular academics started to examine every academic discipline through feminist eyes; and the feminist theologians began to fill in the details of a feminist theology based on the foundation of liberation theology. Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether had established that it was necessary to interpret the Bible with a view toward the liberation of women. They viewed liberation as the essential core for Scriptural interpretation. Their theology was based upon their perception of the oppressed condition of women. It was a woman-centered analysis of theology that placed women and women's experience at the center of the theological process. In the second phase of feminist theological development, they began to name and define the world around them by using their own experience as the new norm for theology and Biblical interpretation.

5.2.3 Presuppositions of Feminist Theology

Ruether and Russell did not regard the Bible as a guidebook full of directives for all time, but rather a tool that assisted people to understand how God had worked throughout history to free the oppressed. As Russell stated, "interpretations of the gospel are tested by the

⁹⁷ R. Ruether (1972), pp.34, 77

experience of Christian communities working with others in society.”⁹⁸ The dynamic view of the Bible which feminists adopted allowed them to adjust Biblical interpretation in order to make the Bible relevant to the problems and perspectives of women in contemporary culture. Feminist theologians argued that Biblical interpretation could and should change.

5.2.4 Methodology of Feminist Theology

Liberation theologies share a certain methodological ingredients of task, approach, and purpose that are important to women and men in their theological reflection. What they are about is *theo*-logy: Using their *logos* (their mind) in the perspective of God, as God is known in and through the Word in the world. Thus Gustavo Guitererez tells us that “theology is critical reflections – in the light of the Word accepted in faith – on historical praxis and therefore on the presence of Christians in the world.”⁹⁹Based on the presupposition of the dynamic nature of Biblical revelation, feminist theologians used a methodology that Russell called “critical reflection.”¹⁰⁰It was the process by which feminist women analyzed the Bible based on their personal experience, and then began to formulate a doctrine applicable to their present situation. Letty Russell stated that this was true “Theo-logy.” She reasoned that feminists should “utilize their logos (their mind) in the perspective of God (theos), as God was known in and through the Word in the world.”¹⁰¹According to Russell, the feminist method of critical reflection was inductive and hence experimental in nature. It was a “process of seeking out the right questions to ask and trying out different hypotheses that arise.”¹⁰² Russell noted that it was “a theology of constantly revised questions and tentative observations about a changing world.”¹⁰³She explained:

In general, women, along with other liberation theologians, stress an inductive rather than a deductive approach. In the past much theology was done by deducing conclusions from first principles established out of Christian tradition and philosophy. Today many people find it more helpful to do theology by an inductive method, drawing out the material for reflection from their life experience as it relates to the gospel message. The gospel is good news to people only when it speaks concretely to their particular needs of liberation.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ L. Russel (1974), p. 50

⁹⁹ G. Gutiérrez (1973), p. 145

¹⁰⁰ L. Russel (1974), p. 52

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 54

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53

Russell stated that the purpose of an experimental, inductive theology was praxis, “action” that was “concurrent with reflection or analysis” and led to “new questions, actions, and reflections.”¹⁰⁵ According to Russell, the purpose of doing theology was not to order the discoveries and conclusions into an overarching plan, but rather to “apply the discoveries to a new way of action to bring about change in society.”¹⁰⁶

5.3 Perspectives of Feminist Theology

This next section presents some of the core perspectives of feminist theology.

5.3.1 Biblical Promise

Letty Russell identified two major motifs or themes of the Bible, liberation and universality.¹⁰⁷ First of all, she viewed God as the ultimate liberator — the one who set people free. Russell did not believe that the Bible taught an indisputable plan for liberation of people of every age, at all times, and for all cultures. She believed, rather, that messages of liberation that were current to our culture could be “drawn out” of the Bible. She said that feminist theologians “aren’t in the slightest claiming that their reading of the Bible is valid for all times. But they say it is the right one for the society we live in today — and that is all that matters.”¹⁰⁸ The second Biblical theme presented by Russell was that of universality. She believed that God’s plan for the world provided an eschatological perspective concerning the future of humanity that promised God’s utopia to all.¹⁰⁹ According to Russell, Christians were but one of the groups who participated in God’s work of liberation.

No longer are lines drawn between Christian and non-Christian, or between one confession and another. Instead, Christians join with all those involved in the revolution of freedom, justice, and peace.¹¹⁰

5.3.2 Salvation as a Social Event

To the feminist theologians, salvation was viewed as a social as well as an individual event. According to Russell, salvation had traditionally been considered an individual event that would be consummated in the afterlife by the corporate redemption of the people of God. She, however, saw salvation as “a present corporate event (...) a condition of shalom or wholeness

¹⁰⁵ L. Russel (1974), p. 55

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

and total social well-being in community with other.”¹¹¹Russell defined salvation as the realization of personal power and corporate responsibility to change the world for the better. She argued that in a historical view of the world, salvation was not an escape from fated nature, but rather “the power and possibility of transforming the world, restoring creation, and seeking to overcome suffering.”¹¹²

5.3.3 Dialogue and Community

The final theme embodied in feminist theology was the process of dialogue in the pursuit of a new community. Unlike some of their secular counterparts, Christian feminists did not want to alienate the oppressors (the men); rather, they wanted to educate and dialogue with them in order to free them into a new consciousness as well. As Ruether noted,

One cannot dehumanize the oppressors without ultimately dehumanizing oneself, and aborting the possibilities of the liberation movement into an exchange of roles of oppressor and oppressed.¹¹³

The feminist theologians believed that in order to liberate the oppressors, true dialogue between the oppressors and the oppressed needed to take place. However, Ruether saw this as impossibility until there was an end to “vertical and horizontal violence.” She explained that in vertical violence hierarchical inequality was expressed between the oppressors and the oppressed: men and women, rich and poor, white and black. In horizontal violence, oppressed groups expressed their own frustrations and their low opinion of themselves by putting one another down and accepting the image of inferiority projected on them by the status quo.¹¹⁴ According to Russell, there would not be true dialogue in the Church “until the structures of oppression were confronted and transformed into a situation of true partnership.”¹¹⁵ She believed that true dialogue between men and women could only happen when women were granted the same rights, responsibilities, and privileges as men in the Church.

5.3.4 God

¹¹¹ L. Russel (1974), p. 61

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ R. Ruether (1972), p. 123

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68

¹¹⁵ L. Russel (1974), p. 70

Biblically, Christians believed that humans existed to serve and bring glory to their Creator, God. Feminist theology, however, shifted the emphasis: God's purpose was to assist humans to realize liberation, wholeness, and utopia for themselves. Russell reasoned;

our human hopes as Christians are always based on the perfect freedom of God. It is God's perfect freedom which is exercised in being for us (...) 'God is not our utopia, but we are God's utopia.'¹¹⁶

5.3.5 Jesus

Jesus Christ, as God's son, was viewed by feminists as an image of full and true humanity. Rather than being God incarnate, Jesus represented a deistic humanity, a "foretaste of freedom" — promised to all.¹¹⁷ Russell explained that:

In him (Jesus) we trust that God has made known the beginnings of the love, obedience, and true humanity which is the destiny of a restored creation. For women and men alike, Jesus embodies in his life, death, and resurrection what a truly human being might be like. One who would love and live and suffer for love of God and for others. He was not just a male; he was for us all, a real live child of God. He was the second humanity (Adam) and showed both parts of humanity, male and female, both the cost and promise of freedom.¹¹⁸

According to Russell, Jesus was not to be viewed as the one who saves, but rather as the primary example of God's salvation, which is liberation. Christ was "the first object and bearer of all salvific tradition."¹¹⁹ Russell believed that:

(...) the Christ event initiated [woman's] freedom in such a way that (they) are drawn with all creation into the horizon of God's freedom by participating in the action of God on behalf of human liberation."¹²⁰

5.3.6 Sin

Feminists argued that the traditional definition of sin was aligned with classical dualities of right and wrong and was thus unacceptable. They redefined sin as "a situation in which there is no community, no room to live as a whole human being."¹²¹ Feminist theologians viewed sin as the opposite of liberation, namely: oppression. According to Russell, sin was "the

¹¹⁶ L. Russel (1974), p. 41

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41

¹²¹ L. Russel (1974), p. 62

dehumanization of others by means of excluding their perspectives from the meaning of human reality and wholeness.”¹²²

5.3.7 Salvation

Feminist theologians defined salvation as a journey toward freedom from sex class oppression and as a process of self-liberation in community with others.¹²³ Russell argued:

Salvation has to do with new joy and wholeness, freedom and hope that is experienced in the lives of individuals and communities as a gift of God. This message of liberation is good news to those of our age who are searching for freedom, for meaning, for community, for authentic existence as human beings.¹²⁴

Because salvation was viewed as the process of liberation, feminists defined “a child of God” as “one who had been set free.” They drew an analogy between coming to consciousness and coming to faith or trust in God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, God’s children were not only those who believed in Jesus; rather, all those who were working for equality were the children of God.¹²⁵

5.3.8 Church

Feminist theologians also changed the traditional understanding of the Church. They viewed the Church as that “people of God” whose reason for existence was to be the servant and midwife of the process of liberation and the over-thrower of the oppressive orders of society. Ruether believed that the Church did not exist for itself, but “to serve the revolution.”¹²⁶ Feminists therefore viewed ecclesiology as open-ended. According to Russell, there were a “variety of possible shapes the church might take in order to participate in God’s liberating activity.”¹²⁷ She maintained that the Church was “called to become open to the world, to others, and to the future.”¹²⁸ Therefore, she saw the Church not as a religious assembly, temple, or synagogue, “but as a part of the world where it joins God’s action in becoming a

¹²² L. Russel (1974), p. 113

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33

¹²⁶ R. Ruether (1972), p. 183.

¹²⁷ L. Russel (1974), p. 158

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

pressure group for change.”¹²⁹ According to Russell, the Church was only “one of the signs of cosmic salvation,” and not the exclusive mediator of that salvation.¹³⁰

5.3.9 Eschatology

Feminist theologians also changed the traditional doctrines of the end-times. They believed that through experiencing and pursuing liberation for people on the earth, humans themselves would usher in a new humanity and witness the “new age” promised by God. According to Russell, the realization of liberation for all would enable the condition of “God with us” to occur.¹³¹ In short, feminist theologians believed that a utopian society of Heaven on earth, justice, peace, and freedom were achievable by humanity.

Feminists have become slightly difficult to identify in our society today, this is not because they do not exist anymore, but because their philosophy has been integrated into mainstream society so thoroughly. The philosophy is almost unidentifiable as feminism, for it is virtually indistinguishable from mainstream. This is not to say that there has been a decline in feminism. Organized secular feminist groups still exist. They are in large measure funded by government money and justify their existence by addressing the remaining legal and social barriers for the phase one and two feminist agendas. But more significantly, feminist philosophy has been effectively integrated into the minds of this generation and into the precepts of contemporary society. Feminist theology on the other hand, has not reached mainstream in the same way.

5.4 Womanist Theology

Womanist theology is a religious movement which reconsiders the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies with a special lens to empower and liberate African women in America. Womanist theology associates with and departs from Feminist theology and Black theology. It is a voice of the African American Christian women in the United States. It is the positive affirmation of the gifts which God has given black women in the U.S. It is, within theological discourse, an emergent voice which advocates a holistic God-talk for all oppressed groups. Even though it is centered in the African American woman's reality and story, it also

¹²⁹ L. Russel (1974), p. 159

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 161

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28

embraces and stands in solidarity with all suppressed subjects. In short, womanist theology is a theory and practice of inclusivity, accenting gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and ecology. Because of its inclusive methodology and conceptual framework, womanist theology exemplifies reconstructed knowledge beyond the concerns of black (male) and (white) feminist theologies.¹³²

5.4.1 A Womanist Definition of Sexual Abuse

A womanist-informed definition of sexual abuse is constructed in terms of the experiences of African-American women within historical context, and in terms of the ethical, religious, and psychological issues regarding sexual violation¹³³. Therefore, the elements of sexual abuse are the violation of one's bodily integrity by force and/or threat of physical violence. It is the violation of the ethic of mutuality and care in relationships of domination. It is a violation of one's psycho-spiritual-sexual integrity by using sexual abuse to control and express violence. Sexual abuse is the violation of the Spirit of God incarnate in each of us.¹³⁴ Eugene states that the traditional response of the Black community to violence committed against women and children – has been silence. Not a silence that stems from acceptance of violence, it stems from shame, fear, and an understandable sense of racial loyalty.¹³⁵ A pernicious combination of internal and external forces has prevented the Black community from addressing the multiple issues of violence as they are manifested through rape, incest, and domestic violence.

5.5 Feminist Perspectives on Sexual Abuse

“Man's violent capture and rape of the female led to (...) the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy.”¹³⁶ Susan Brownmiller, an American journalist and a civil rights activist, identified the act of rape and the subsequent development of a “rape culture” as the cause of patriarchy. According to Brownmiller, rape culture was the cultural atmosphere in which “the raping of women is taken to be normal, and even expected, and in which male attitudes toward women, and those of women toward themselves and other women are colored by this assumption. Brownmiller observed that male physical anatomy allowed men

¹³² L. Thomas, *Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm*.

¹³³ Y. Eugene, (1995) *Swing low, Sweet Chariot!* (1995), p. 186

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 187

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ S. Brownmiller (1975), *Against Our Will*, pp. 7, 8

to dominate women by force in the act of rape. She hypothesized that men discovered this ability early in history and had used it ever since for this advantage.

. . . rape is man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.¹³⁷

Brownmiller acknowledged that all men were not rapists however; she argued that all men belonged to the portion of the human species capable of rape. She believed that men had thus developed a “mass psychology of the conqueror” — a mind-set that placed men above women because men could potentially conquer women. Brownmiller also proposed that the fear of rape would cause a woman to associate herself with a male who would offer her protection from other males. This, according to Brownmiller, was the cause and origin of marriage and of all the societal structures of domination.

Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination toward monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating.¹³⁸

Brownmiller hypothesized that man's violent capture and rape of the female led first to the establishment of a rudimentary male-protectorate and then sometime later to the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy.¹³⁹ In her view, the act of rape was paradigmatic of male attitudes towards women, if not in practice, then at least in theory. She pointed out that this did not mean that all women wanted to be raped, nor that all men wanted to rape women. But it did mean that, although rape was carried out as an actual act only by some men, all men in some sense benefited from their actions.

5.6 Summary

Letty Russel and Rosemary Radford Ruether began to develop a theology specific to the liberation of women. They based their theology on the liberation theology from Latin America. They found many parallels between the condition of the Latin American people and the condition of women. Like liberation theology, feminist theology was written out of an experience of oppression in society. Their key to world liberation was the liberation of what

¹³⁷ S. Brownmiller (1975), p 5

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 7, 8

they considered to be the world's largest oppressed class, namely women. Letty Russel's first goal of liberation was self-realized freedom for the oppressed; her second goal was a new communal social ethic. The final goal of liberation was the realization of a new humanity. Feminist theologians had a vision for a new age and a paradisaic renewal of earth and society. Ruether and Russell argued that the Bible supported the liberation of women. The Bible pointed toward the freedom and integral personhood of woman. They advocated a new communal social ethic in which those who had already experienced freedom would struggle on behalf of other groups who had yet to experience it. Ruether and Russell believed that the Kingdom of God would be realized when people achieved a new planetary humanity by harmonizing all dualisms.

Womanist theology is a theological movement which reconsiders the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies with a special lens to empower and liberate African women in America. It is centered in the African American woman's reality and story, but it also embraces and stands in solidarity with all suppressed subjects.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW FEMINIST-LIBERATION THEOLOGY CAN BE A RESOURCE IN DIACONAL WORK WITH VICTIMS OF RAPE

6.1 Introduction

Liberation theology and especially feminist liberation theology can be a resource in diaconal work with victims of rape in many different areas. Sexual violence provokes spiritual as well as physical and mental crises. Questions like: Where was God and why did God allow this to happen to me? Is my sinfulness the cause of this? Do I need to forgive my abuser? What is justice and how can it be achieved? Whom can I tell? Who will support me? Victims of sexual violence often turns to their religious institutions in seeking help to answer these questions. Survivors often experience a rupture in their sense of belonging within a shared system of belief. How do they rebuild their own shattered assumptions and resolve their differences with those whose beliefs they can no longer share? As church we should be able to give honest and real answers to such important questions.¹⁴⁰

What is it we really want out of life and the human encounters we have? As deacons, we want to provide a Christian theology and preaching that can help set people free from what binds and limits their life force. Theology as a discipline has not always been particularly interested in dealing with how people actually live, think, feel and act. It has primarily interpreted texts and earlier theological systems of thought, and far too little interpreted life as people are actually experiencing it. Feminist liberation theology is an example of a contextual theology; it has a clear starting point and reflection in people's actual living conditions, and especially in women's suffering and oppression. This chapter is intended as a contribution to this self-critical theological work. I will highlight some of the issues that may occur in the meeting between abuse experience and a religious interpretation of reality, issues that are related to phenomena such as guilt, shame, sin, suffering, forgiveness, liturgy, stigmatization and healing. The ambition of theology is to be an interpretation of life as it is experienced by people today. Diaconal work in general is interdisciplinary. It combines theology, social work, and psychology. This, in itself, is beneficial in the work with victims of rape, as they are a complex group with a variety of specific needs.

¹⁴⁰ C. Adams and M. Fortune (eds) (1995), *Violence against Women and Children*, p. 9

6.2 Diakonia

The Norwegian Church defines diakonia like this:

Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice.¹⁴¹

The detailed plan for diakonia in the Norwegian Church states that:

As a church we are called to work for justice and human rights globally as well as locally. Examples are the issues raised by globalization, international trade, illegitimate debts, poverty, war, peace and reconciliation, and technological development.

One of the goals set by the church is: “Church and parishes in support of people who feel that their dignity is being violated.”¹⁴² With this new plan for diakonia in the Norwegian Church they wanted to put a stronger focus on "struggle." Diakonia has often been low-key, characterized by the close, personal encounter with another person. But sometimes it is important and also appropriate to raise our voices; to go to the barricades to speak out about and protest against injustice. The people of diakonia must dare to be advocates for the poor, excluded, vulnerable and to be a voice for those without a voice. This is related directly to the goal of fighting for justice.¹⁴³

Victims of rape are a group that can be included as “people who feel that their dignity is being violated”. The victims of rape also represent a group in our society that struggles for justice. They are also to a certain degree without a voice, meaning that they also represent a vulnerable group that is not getting the attention they need from our society. The fact that the victims of rape that actually dare to go to the police, and end up in the court system makes the role of being an “advocate” relevant. It is a stated fact that most women who goes to court end up feeling like the court system is an additional assault and trauma. To have the support of a diaconal worker can be a part of easing this experience.

Letty Russel writes that women in particular are called to curative diakonia which is the “healing of the wounds of those who have become victims of life; providing help to the sick, the hungry, and the homeless.” Second, they are to be involved in preventive diakonia which

¹⁴¹ Plan for Diakoni (2008), <http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=18778>, p. 1

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 21

¹⁴³ K. Jordheim (2009) Plan for diakoni i Den norske kirke- en presentasjon, pp. 14-15

is “attempting to curtail developments that might easily lead to restriction of full freedom for life.” Finally, and most importantly, Russell states that women tastes Biblical freedom in order to practice what she calls prospective diakonia which she defines as “attempting to open the situation for a future realization of life; helping those who are outcasts from the dominant culture or society to participate fully in society or to reshape that society.”¹⁴⁴ Diakonia is supposed to be genuine solidarity in groaning. This it can be only when it moves toward preventative programs and finally into prospective advocacy of the rights of people to decide for themselves how to work out their political and social liberation.¹⁴⁵ According to Russell, diakonia therefore means “a genuine struggle to see that the church takes steps to support prospective action on the part of those groups and movements working for their own liberation and development.”¹⁴⁶ In sum, Russell views liberation as an ongoing process of intervention on behalf of others.

(...) liberation is a long journey. It is a never-ending struggle by people to find out who they are and what they must become. (...) As long as people are oppressed there will be a groaning for freedom, whether in actions of rebellion or in actions to build a new future of justice for all. It is the calling of men and women to stay on that road toward freedom and to keep the freedom rumor going.¹⁴⁷

The broad definition of liberation theology stresses the interrelatedness of differing structures of oppression and domination. Liberation from oppressive structures necessarily involves political, economic, social, racial, ethnic, and sexual aspects. As a paradigm, liberation theology today places explicit emphasis on assessing different forms of human oppression and suffering, and liberation from them, as layers in a complicated process. In the work with victims of sexual abuse there are many areas where liberation is needed. The rest of this chapter is designated to different topics where I see (feminist) liberation theology as a resource for victims of rape.

6.3 Traditional Theology – a Burden? Feminist Liberation Theology - a Resource

The writers of the book *Fra skam til verdighet* stress in the introduction of the book that just as with the use of good psychology, - good theology can also increase the human ability to repair what has been trampled and soiled. The challenge is to provide assistance that makes

¹⁴⁴ L. Russel (1972), p. 32

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 44-45

the women able to bear and to deal with the emotional pain that the violation has given them. What seems lost and broken can be healed.¹⁴⁸

Theology as a discipline has not always been particularly interested in dealing with how people actually live, think, feel and act. For most of its history, theology has had a kind of empirical refusal. It has in many ways betrayed its role as interpretative science. This does not mean that theology has not interpreted. However, it has primarily interpreted texts and earlier theological systems of thought, and far too little interpreted life as people are actually experiencing it. This is fortunately not the whole truth. In recent decades it has been developed a lot of theological literature and practices that have their clear starting point and reflection in people's actual living conditions, and especially in human suffering and oppression. Much of the liberation theology and feminist theology that have been presented in chapter four and five are examples of this contextual theology. God's relationship to suffering, man's lost dignity, Christian legitimation of oppressive structures, but also its liberating potential, have been central themes in liberation theologies. Despite a fairly extensive production and research on alternative practices, these theologies unfortunately have not reached the mainstream. Feminist and liberation theology is hardly a part of the curriculum of the theological institutions. They are marginalized and have a somewhat esoteric status and appear as an addition to the so-called "real" theology. Despite important exceptions it can still be justified to say that most of the theology conveyed in this country has not been sufficiently challenged by people's complex and difficult experiences. The main problem is still the ecclesiastical practice. The tradition of criticism and attempts at innovation which after all are at some of the theological institutions, has seldom resulted in religious preaching and practice.¹⁴⁹

When someone is protesting against the parts of the Judeo-Christian tradition that appear to be life-retardant, it does not necessarily mean that one has simply made a decision to have a positive religion, and therefore choose to ignore the unpleasant parts, and solely concentrate on what seems harmless. It is more a matter of trying to take seriously, and really draw the consequences of what we as a Christian church say about what believe in, and what methodology we use. Liberation theology does theology by an inductive method — drawing out the material for reflection from life experience as it relates to the gospel message. Stress is

¹⁴⁸ T. Anstorp, B. Hovland, Beate and E. Torp (eds.) (2003), *Fra Skam til Verdighet*, p. 16

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

placed on the situation-variable nature of the gospel. The gospel is good news to people only when it speaks concretely to their particular needs of liberation.¹⁵⁰ How can for instance people relate to someone talking about God as good, while one at the same time is continuing the so-called divine ordinances and practices that are keeping people down? Or that someone is talking about man as fundamentally evil, while at the same time expecting a moral perfectionism of the same depraved man?¹⁵¹

The following subjects that are presented are especially important for many victims of rape. To become aware of, and work with these subjects are, to many, the beginning of healing and liberation.

6.4 Shame, Sin and Guilt

Most women who are exposed to abuse are familiar with the feeling of shame. Sexual abuse is by far still a difficult topic for most people to talk about, it is also still somewhat of a taboo in our society. A woman of Christian faith, that belongs to a Christian church, which is exposed to sexual abuse or rape, may also recognize herself in a description of human beings as sinful and guilty. Hovland states that far less are likely to recognize a good and gracious God. Some have preserved a notion of a good and gracious God. However, this is a God who is not for them. For that their shame and guilt are too great.¹⁵²

6.4.1 Shame

First it is necessary to explain a little bit about the phenomenology of shame and the consequences of it. Emotions of shame are a heterogeneous group of emotions, and research has not reached the so-called sufficient and necessary criteria to classify them. There are several characteristics of an experience of shame, not all of these needs to be present in order to be called shame. It is the negative, chronic shame that is most relevant in a therapy situation with victim of rape. One feature that is present in most shameful experiences is the feeling of being exposed to an unpleasant, involuntary and uncontrollable manner.¹⁵³ One is seen, but not as a worthy and autonomous individual. One is revealed, objectified and rejected.¹⁵⁴ The feeling of exposure that comes with emotions of shame may raise the self awareness to paralyzing heights, and an acute, inner insulation is following. The interpersonal

¹⁵⁰ L. Russel (1972), p. 44

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 46

¹⁵² B. Hovland, Du med nåden, jeg med skammen, å hvor vi dog passer sammen? In Fra skam til verdighet. p. 47

¹⁵³ S. Pattison (2000), p. 71

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 104

bridge is broken, and an ashamed person feels that she does not have strength to restore relations. Shame prisons the self and may take the person deeper into despair.¹⁵⁵ Shame is wordless, silent and can be difficult to recognize. Shame can be called an "ironic" emotion; it is more silent, the more intense it is.¹⁵⁶ Victims of rape may experience both guilt and shame; these two feelings are often confused. Guilt is easier to deal with than shame, because it can be confessed and repented. The guilty person can maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy through appropriate action. Shame is more difficult. It is the feeling that the whole self is bad and defective.¹⁵⁷ People who are ashamed are not helped by confession and forgiveness, what they need is to see themselves in a more positive light, and gain a more valued sense of self.¹⁵⁸ Shame reactions are usually always present in conversations with victims of rape, regardless of religious background. No matter what the root of anyone's shame is, it needs to be dealt with. When shame is the predominant feeling in a person, it is the development of the self that needs attention, whereas when it is guilt that is predominant, it is the act of the self that needs attention. In actual treatment, one might have to move back and forth between shame and guilt.¹⁵⁹

6.4.2 The Preaching of and for the Guilty and Ashamed Human being

In order to create a positive self-understanding, in general, and especially for victims of rape that suffer from shame, a focus on *imago Dei*, the fact that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore have inherent value independent of their utility or function is a good starting-point.¹⁶⁰ One of the areas where the church often has not been consistent enough in relation to its starting point is the proclamation of love. Although it is generally agreed on that the core of the Christian faith is God's love to the world, many of which has been or still is a part of a Christian community do not feel worthy of the love and forgiveness that is preached. The Christian community cannot renounce all the blame for this situation. Much of the traditional Christian preaching and theology has been centered on sin and shame as central human realities. Man's fall and redemption has been a main focus, and the road to restoration for the fallen man is said to go through repentance and confession to forgiveness. But what to do if the human being who is ashamed, responds that it does not deserve forgiveness, and is not worthy of God's favor?

¹⁵⁵ S. Pattison (2000), p. 74

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43-44

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173

¹⁶⁰ I. Wangen (2010), *Sex, sin and stigma*, p. 100

While the church and theology have given much attention to the guilt and forgiveness, the phenomenon of shame has often been ignored. There are however good reasons to argue that the phenomenon of shame is often more fundamental in the human struggle with herself and the world, than guilt is. A person's feeling of shame can lead to that preaching of forgiveness is not having any "effect". It can even make matters worse. It is therefore important that we insist, and eventually restore whatever we can find in Christian tradition and theology that has a liberating potential.¹⁶¹ Liberation theology offers a different view on sin and a more positive view on human beings this in itself can be a resource in the encounter with a shameful human being, and be liberating.

6.4.3 The Importance of Maintaining the Relationship between Power and Responsibility, Guilt and Damage.

To make a feeling of guilt make sense, the presupposition is that there is accountability. The Danish theologian Løgstrup says that it is our mutual dependence on each other that gives us a fundamental responsibility in relation to each other.¹⁶² Fundamentally, we are interdependent and have power over each other. Unfortunately, a lot of theological reflection on guilt and accountability has focused in a small degree on the power aspect of human relationships. One of the factors that may affect the balance of power in a relationship, namely the gender aspect, has also largely been passed over in silence. The speech of guilt can easily become meaningless and shed little light on the interpersonal relationships if it is done too abstract, like the idea that we are all sinners and guilty before God.¹⁶³ Feminist liberation theology has to a large degree worked with these issues. Awareness and preaching of this can be a liberating factor for all women, but especially victims of rape, where the power structure between man and woman is so evident.

The basic stories that Christian faith and theology is based on leaves little doubt that, the God who requires accounting from us, is also a God who identifies with victims of abuse, in the broadest sense.¹⁶⁴ A theological question of human responsibility and guilt should have as its starting point that the God, who requires people to account, is not driven by the desire to pursue punitive retaliation against the perpetrators, but through the desire to give the victims

¹⁶¹ B. Hovland(2003), p. 47

¹⁶² As quoted in *fra skam til verdighet*, p. 47. KE Løgstrup (1991) *The ethical demand*. Copenhagen Gyldendal. my translation.

¹⁶³ B. Hovland(2003), p. 48

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49

redress.¹⁶⁵ There is little doubt that the church and theology's strong focus on sin, guilt, evil and the human fall has helped enhancing the destructive feeling of shame in many people. Rather than paving the way for a message of mercy and grace, people have had feelings of being inadequate, unworthy, dirty, or whatever words one chooses to put on shame, confirmed.¹⁶⁶ Pattison points out many elements in traditional Christianity that can justify a shameful personality, including the liturgy's emphasis on submission and humiliation, the preaching about pride as a carnal sin, dogmas of original sin and vicarious atonement. Pattison encourages counselors to be sensitive in their observation and listening to individuals and groups. Passionate listening makes both the speaker and the listener subjects, and through this the person in need of help can get a chance to be integrated into a common discourse and get out of the silence of shame.

6.4.4 Sin-talk that leads to Stigmatization and Shame

In addition to being ashamed, a victim of rape is also struggling with suspicion and stigmatization from society in general. This is increasing the feeling of shame. The Norwegian bishop Gunnar Stålsett said:

It is your right to be heard and believed. If the church wants to be of help to those who have been exposed to violence and sexual abuse, the church must dare to take sides already in the first meeting with the victim. To believe the injured women's story is the beginning of a new narrative of self-respect.¹⁶⁷

Irene Tvedt Wangen's doctoral thesis *Sex, sin and stigma* is aimed at victims of HIV and AIDS, however, the way I see it there are several factors in common between these two groups: victims of HIV and AIDS and victims of rape. The stigma surrounding rape is still present in our society. This is the reason why i.e. names of victims are not published in cases of rape. Some examples of victim blaming from family, friends, neighbors, TV reporters, law officers, prosecutors and strangers include questions like: "What were you wearing?" "What were you doing out so late?" The subsequent interrogation by the police, lawyers, doctors, etc., sometimes almost feels more traumatic than the actual rape - and they become a "public" invasion and exposure of a "private" experience. The stigmatization and blaming from society is an extra burden to a victim of rape. In Christian circles the sin-talk that is often used, can also become an extra burden on a victim that is already blaming herself, and is full of feelings of shame for what happened to her.

¹⁶⁵ B. Hovland(2003), p. 50

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 51

¹⁶⁷ T. Anstorp, B. Hovland, Beate and E. Torp (eds.) (2003), p. 90 (my translation)

Social sin-talk, i.e. the identification of social evils, is prone to stigmatization and marginalization because one easily falls into the trap of using stereotypic language and images. Marginalizing and stigmatizing sin-talk may be the result that theologians and others talking about sin are sometimes naive and unaware of how their sin-talk is part of a social discourse that marginalizes and stigmatizes people.¹⁶⁸

Sin is traditionally understood in two ways. The first one understands sin in legal terms; it is a violation of the will of God.¹⁶⁹ The other understanding of sin is sin as a *relational* problem - the disruption of the relationship between God and humanity; this again leads to the disruption of all human relationships. The understanding of sin as crime, pride and disordered desire may contribute both to social stigmatization related to victims of rape, but also self-stigmatization. The relational understanding of sin may also be problematic, especially the way Martin Luther formulated it as “the human being so deeply affected by sin that the image of God is destroyed”.¹⁷⁰ The main problem with the understanding of sin as pride, crime or disordered desire is that it locates sin within the individual, and suggests that human beings are fundamentally bad – and this nurtures shame and strengthens self-stigmatization.¹⁷¹ Pattison argues that Christians are not good enough for their own standards, because they are “sinners”. They are therefore left in an impossible position between the ideal they are supposed to live up to and the failure in doing so.¹⁷² This comes as an extra burden to ashamed people.

To commit specific discrete sins and offences and then to acknowledge these and be forgiven is to be an actor who takes responsibility and sometimes makes mistakes. To be a sinner is to have made a global judgment about the whole self as fundamentally bad, defective and worthy of rejection.¹⁷³

This distinction is crucial for human beings self-understanding. As a victim of rape a good understanding of self can be liberating, and a major step towards healing. How we talk about sin is important, and it is our responsibility as diaconal workers. Sin-talk will always be contextual. When we talk about sin we are talking about it as human beings that are part of a society and a culture. Locating sin solely within the human being may lead to an individualistic understanding and it may lend itself to moralistic interpretations. Moralistic

¹⁶⁸ I. Wangen (2010), p. 55

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82

¹⁷² S. Pattison (2000), p. 256

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 266

interpretations of sin may again lead to a social sin-talk that contributes to marginalization and stigmatization of individual and groups, such as i.e. victims of rape.

6.5 Liberation Theologies Perspectives on Sin

“Sin does not only affect human relationship, but also the way we organize society. Liberation theology calls for the transformation of sinful and oppressive social structures because they cause the destruction of human life.”¹⁷⁴ According to liberation theology there are two distinct forms of structures that human beings create; *structures of grace* and *structures of sin*.¹⁷⁵ Structural sin is characterized by exploitation, domination, slavery and injustice found in concrete historical situations. Sin is understood as a social historical fact, as causing actual suffering for people in actual situations and is an offence against God.¹⁷⁶ It can be a liberating process to get ones focus away from self blame and shame, and on to social structures that needs to be changed, like i.e. feminist liberation. Even though the liberation theologians argue that the traditional notion of sin in terms of personal/actual sin and original sin represents an inadequate understanding of sin, they also argue that there is a relationship between structural sin and individual sin. Oppressive social structures “manifest and actualize the power of sin.” They do not, however, commit sin, human beings do. Behind every oppressive structure there is human willing.¹⁷⁷ Liberation theology emphasizes how human beings are both caught in structures of sin, as well as being the will and force behind the very same structures. When sin takes on structural form, human beings are more often manipulated than manipulators. Human beings become enslaved by their own structures and system. Sin enslaves people both from within and through external forces. The personal and the structural aspects of sin are inseparable. Thus, any approach to sin that only deal with one or the other aspect of sin is inadequate. “Any liberation of sin must be both a liberation of the person from the forces that keep the person unable to act freely and a liberation from the external forces that enslaves that person and many more.”¹⁷⁸ For a victim of rape this can involve learning to put the blame and guilt where it belongs, with the rapist, not on the victim herself.

Contrary to traditional theological definitions of sin, liberation theology focuses on human damage as the true meaning of the Christian notion of sin. Sin is what damages human existence and human beings needs to be liberated from the sin that keeps them oppressed.

¹⁷⁴ I. Wangen (2010), p. 100

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 101

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Liberation from sin is a movement of grace and forgiveness, it gives people the opportunity to liberate themselves from the structures that suppress them and take away their freedom. The strength of this humanized understanding of sin is that it addresses the consequences of sin as they manifest themselves in the real life.¹⁷⁹ For a victim of rape, to grasp the understanding that it is really what was done to her by the rapist, and the social stigma from society, and not her inner self, that is what is considered sin, is a liberating truth.

Human beings as created in the image of God – Imago Dei – this term is slightly vague, and there are many theological opinions on how to understand this term. Wangen states that she believes “that we need a positively formulated concept of the human being as a contrast and defense against the denial of humanity that is embedded in the process of stigmatisation.”¹⁸⁰ I will add that this is not just important in relation to stigma, but also in general in our encounters with shameful human beings.

The experience of shame is challenging when it comes to stigmatization of victims of rape. On one hand women are being stigmatized simply because they have been raped, on the other hand this very stigmatization results in shame.¹⁸¹ Wangen writes that shame is the feeling of being “rejectable” – the experience of shame may become who we are and defines ourselves as. The experience of shame may become so severe that all hope is lost.¹⁸²

No matter what the root of anyone’s shame is, it is important that it is dealt with. When shame is the predominant feeling in a person, it is the development of the self that needs attention, whereas when it is guilt that is predominant, it is the act of the self that needs attention. In actual treatment, one might have to move back and forth between shame and guilt.¹⁸³

Feminist liberation theology is interpreting sin from a feminist perspective. The male perspective on what constitutes sin and temptation; such as aggression, lust, and hybris, - may not be on the top list for women who have been enculturated to be submissive. Russel says that in short the feminine sin is: underdevelopment or negation of self.

In various liberation theologies sin is viewed not only as the opposite of liberation or the oppression of others but also as the opposite of humanization or the *dehumanization* of others by means of excluding their perspectives from the meaning of human reality and wholeness.

¹⁷⁹ I. Wangen (2010), p. 102

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 168

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 173

Sin is regarded as social, historical fact, the absence of (...) (humanhood) and love in relationships among (...) (people), the breach of friendship with God and with other (...) (people), and, therefore, an interior, personal fracture. When it is considered in this way, the collective dimensions of sin are rediscovered.¹⁸⁴

6.6 Suffering

A common human reaction to suffering is that suffering cannot be random or meaningless – because the world must be “just” (like the example from Brison in chapter two). The common understanding is that people deserve what they get. The reason this hypothesis is so powerful is that it is too threatening for us to face the fact that our own good deeds and hard work may not secure us happiness; instead we may suffer misfortune randomly. Victims of trauma may sometimes find it easier to cope if they hold themselves partially responsible for what happened to them, even though this means accepting themselves as “bad” or “unworthy”.¹⁸⁵

Those who are exposed to abuse, and who have a religious faith, can hardly avoid asking the question of who and where God was when the abuse was going on, and what status they themselves had as a subject to these actions. Facing severe abuse, these issues become acute and inescapable.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, it is also important that theology takes these experiences seriously. If theology and preaching are to survive as a life-interpretation, it must tell the truth about human life. It must relate to how life might look and feel - both at its worst and at its best. If a Christian preaching and theology has as a part of their self-understanding that it should be a part of setting people free, and making the burdens that keep people down easier. Diaconal workers can never stop asking the self-critical question of how, what is said, is actually working. Does it liberate? Or is it on the contrary making matters worse?

Trying to explain suffering is one the biggest problems in theology. Liberation theology focuses on God not only as observing the evil and the suffering; God is present in the suffering. God is suffering together with those who suffer. This can get our attention away from asking why we suffer, and on to the fact that God Himself is present with, and suffering together with the suffering. This might not be a sufficient answer to the Theodicy question,

¹⁸⁴ G. Guiterrez, (1973), p. 175

¹⁸⁵ I. Wangen (2010), p. 56

¹⁸⁶ B. Hovland(2003), p. 44

but it might be a comforting truth.

6.7 Reconciliation and Forgiveness

It is common to associate forgiveness with Christian faith. Today, however, secular psychology is also concerned with this subject. Research on forgiveness and reconciliation processes is increasing. Research shows that shame is often a more complicated factor than the feeling of guilt in the process where reconciliation and forgiveness is the goal. Guilt and empathy involves the same processes. Psychological research shows that giving and receiving forgiveness actually contributes to better mental health, however it may not always feel right for the individual to go that way. In this context, it is anyway important to distinguish between forgiveness and acceptance of what happened. To recognize something is something different than accepting something. To leave something behind, to let go of hatred, can for someone be congruent with forgiveness. Others will interpret it as part of a healing grieving process, without being willing to say that he or she has forgiven. Løgstrup points out that it is only God who can forgive the oppressors and the perpetrators without having to minimize the suffering of the victims – because God is rising up the victims and giving them back the life that they have been deprived of - in God's eternity.¹⁸⁷

Benedicte Ericson wrote “Mass of a desecrated child”; she is a minister in the Norwegian church, and she also works at the Church’s Resource Center. She says in an interview with the Norwegian newspaper “Dagbladet”:

The church must remind us of our dignity, not take it from us. I believe the church has made matters worse for people exposed to sexual abuse because the church is talking about us as sinful. Instead of being concerned with our dignity, the church has focused on sin and guilt.

She states that it is not possible to claim that we should forgive a sexual assault. Ericson wants more emphasis on the Christian message of love, rather than that the church focuses on people as sinners. She says:

When the church speaks of the message of love, why not talk about it in such a way that people want to hear it? It is as if we are graciously allowed to come to church with

¹⁸⁷ As quoted in B. Hovland (2003), p. 50

our sin. I believe the church throughout history have wanted to scare to obedience, rather than to convey the charity of Jesus.”¹⁸⁸

An example of her honesty from her “Mass of a desecrated child”:

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.
Lord help me to realize how wrong it is that I am carrying the guilt that is not my own. Help me so I dare to carry the responsibilities I have, not only for myself, but for him, my perpetrator, to liberate us from this lie about his innocence. Help me as I realize that it is the truth that sets us free; him to see his guilt, me to see my innocence. So I will be free to see myself as an ordinary sinful and guilty human being, who also needs your forgiveness. But not for this!!¹⁸⁹

This is a crucial message, and a good example on how it is possible to speak the truth about human experience, without the artificial distance that may occur in a church setting. It is truly a liberating message for someone who struggles with themselves after a rape (or incest, as is the case for the mass).

6.8 Rituals

The last thirty years it has in general been an increasing professionalization of social care for victims of crises and disasters in Norway, and an expansion and development of the Church's efforts has been parallel and a part of this. The religious element in this has been extensive; particularly a large extent of this applies to the ritual-symbolic part of care. An example of this is the memorial services. It has also emerged an extensive and flexible repertoire of ritual and symbolic practices that are used in churches, on accident locations, schools, etc. Research shows that this has largely been of help to the victims.¹⁹⁰ Norwegian bishop Ernst Baasland emphasizes that a particular reason why rituals are so important is because a traumatic event often feels unrealistic. Rituals are an important part of making victims come to terms with what has happened.¹⁹¹ This work is diaconal by its very definition. Diaconal care is supposed to be a mutual and respectful relationship between fellow human beings. This is emphasized in the new plan for diakonia of the Norwegian Church. As a victim of rape that might feel shame and guilt for what has happened this is important. Liturgy and rituals are places where diakonia can be made visible, and where people can be offered fellowship. As long as we

¹⁸⁸ T. Rønning (2003) Kirka en plage for sex-misbrukte
<http://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/2003/09/21/379036.html>

¹⁸⁹ B. Ericson, (2003), Messe for et skjendet barn, in *Fra Skam til verdighet*, p. 28 (my translation)

¹⁹⁰ H. Stifoss Hansen (2009) Når verden raser sammen. Diakonien identitet, ritualer som diakoni og diakonens yrkesrolle. In *Diakoni en kritisk lesebok*. K. Johannessen, K. Jordheim, K. Korslien (eds.), p. 170

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171

know, human beings have always used rituals, especially for religious communications. By using the ritual expression, we act diaconal with each other, right in the core of the diaconal assignment. When we as the church are acting ritually, we can open a room where comfort is created, this could hardly have happened in any other forms of interaction. Stifoss-Hansen says we can call this an act of empowerment.¹⁹²

The Norwegian Church's Resource Center have learned that many people with experience of sexual abuse feel violated, or placed in an inferior position in the service context. It can be a reminder of the abuse situation. They have worked at the Resource Center to find out more about why the traditional worship service is difficult, and what can be done so that this can become a good experience.¹⁹³ A basic respect for human life and experience, along with a belief that it is possible to create a good room and opportunities where people that have been violated, may be present with all that they have in the face of God and a community, should be a starting point for all Christian activities. Many people can tell about ministers and preachers who preach about the individual's life history and even painful experiences are included. But when that which is the frame around the sermon, the liturgical content and choice of Biblical texts and hymns, still is pointing in a different direction, it becomes confusing and unclear what beliefs one is supposed deal with. The Resource Centre has prepared a suitable liturgical practice, where the objective is to ensure that the vulnerable can take back their power and dignity.¹⁹⁴ I will not present this liturgy in detail, but I would like to look at some of the principles used in this work.

It is possible to embrace faith in the images of a good God, who wants good things. These are the pictures of God that are valid in the Christian tradition. If these images are to be trustworthy, it means that images and ideas that give God contradictory qualities must be reviewed and rejected. The Resource Centre regards it necessary to insist on the unique divine images and the representation of God that shows that God always works through kindness, and never through evil.¹⁹⁵ This is in line with feminist liberation theology. An example of this is according to Torp; In seeking to facilitate a good religious room, it has been important to provide room for anger. In anger, there is a power and energy that can contribute to something good. The mind gives first and foremost support and energy to place blame and responsibility where it belongs, to become clear and able to set boundaries. When we want to give room for

¹⁹² H. Stifoss Hansen (2009) p. 175

¹⁹³ E. Torp (2005) Vi slipper deg ikke Gud. In *Fra skam til verdighet*, p. 65

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

anger in a liturgical context, it is important to find appropriate expressions that release energy and healing.¹⁹⁶ The power of being able to say that we are angry, and that there is reason to be angry, is in itself a liberating force.

It took years to develop this liturgical practice. The liturgy is the result of a creative collaboration between the staff at the Resource Centre and the users. The cooperation can be described as a democratic process where, through conversations, reading of the bible and writing of texts in fellowship, they worked out and tested the content and form of the liturgy. This method of developing liturgy is about empowerment, in that they assume that the knowledge and expertise about liturgical practice, is best found with the people that this practice is intended to be for. It is Liberation Theology that has developed this method called contextual Bible reading.¹⁹⁷ It is a way of reading the Bible on the premises of the reader that is the perspective of the oppressed on their own context.

6.9 Challenge to Diaconal work

As a diaconal Church the calling is to work for exposed and vulnerable groups. Today we see an extensive diaconal work with i.e. grieving and sick people. Marie Fortune is writing in her thought provoking blog called “Where Are We?” how she was presenting a workshop on how to challenge the roadblocks which the church can present to battered women and affirm the resources. Towards the end of the session, one woman raised her hand and asked:

I want to know why I never see anyone from the battered woman’s church sitting with her in court. I am a prosecutor and I never see a person of faith accompany her. Sometimes a pastor will be there--sitting with the perpetrator. Why is this?”

The absence of a pastoral presence in support of a battered woman or a rape victim is such a profound contradiction in our faith traditions. In Judaism, Islam and Christianity, the expectation is fundamental that we support those who are oppressed or injured as they seek justice and healing. Fortune suggests that maybe the problem is that too many people of faith do not see the battered woman or rape victim as oppressed or in need of support. Rather perhaps they are so busy trying to figure out what she did to “cause” her own situation. She states:

¹⁹⁶ E. Torp (2005), p. 67

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70

So I figure if we can spend 4 hours sitting with a cancer patient while he receives his chemo, we can surely spend 4 hours sitting with a battered woman or rape victim while she seeks justice. It just may push us beyond our comfort zone--and we might discover something about how we are the hands and feet of God for one another.¹⁹⁸

This is one example of how diaconal work with victims of rape can improve the support system offered to victims of rape.

It is also important that diaconal workers are aware of what is being preached, and how to use theology as a liberating force, instead of an extra burden to an already vulnerable group. By presenting a positive view on human beings, and build up the self-image of victims of rape from the inside is a liberating process. The Resource Center already exists, now the challenge is that diaconal workers use the resources that are available.

¹⁹⁸ M. Fortune, Where are we? <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/blog/marie-fortune> (my translation)

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.1 SUMMARY

This master thesis started out at a course about sexual abuse at the Norwegian Church Resource Center for Sexually Abused that I attended the fall of 2009, in relation to my studies in diaconal work. I have been interested in Liberation theology for a while, and it occurred to me that the Resource Center seemed to be using this theology in a practical way in their work with victims of sexually abuse. The work they are doing is diaconal by its very definition. The increasing problem of rape in our society, and seemingly, to my understanding, the small extent that the church has been involved with this vulnerable group in our society led me to my research question: “How feminist liberation theology can be a resource in diaconal work with victims of rape.” The church has focused more on this group in recent years, but it is still a long way to go. The resource center was established in 1996, as a statement that the Norwegian church is taking the problem of sexual violence in our society seriously. However according to their annual report they are not receiving sufficient government funding to run the center as they wish, this tells me, that is still a long way to go.

In order to answer my main research question, I made more precise sub-questions: What is rape? What are the aftermaths of rape, both short-term and long-term? What is normal treatment for women who has experienced rape? What is liberation theology? What is feminist theology, and feminist liberation theology? In a diaconal setting, can feminist liberation theology be a resource in the work for recovery and in the healing process after rape?

Chapter two has dealt with what rape is, and what common aftermath of rape is. I have dealt with the legal definition of rape; in this I have used Norwegian law. There are different categories of rape, like blitz rape, and confidence rape. I have looked at statistics concerning rape in Norway, - these figures are not uplifting reading, the numbers are increasing every year. Rape is a traumatic event, and the aftermath is often severe. Many rape victims end up with mental problems, and some are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms are commonly grouped into three types: *hyperarousal*, *intrusion* and *constriction*. Each of these categories are presented in chapter two.

Chapter three is dealing with common treatment of victims of rape and how coping and healing can be achieved. Some of the theories presented are basic human interaction with a

victim of rape, and some are for diaconal workers, and some of the theories require psychological education and a special interest in the work with traumatized people.

Most women who are exposed to abuse are familiar with the feeling of shame; I am therefore presenting theories on how to work therapeutic with shameful women.

Chapter four is aiming at giving an introduction to liberation theology. This is a movement in Christian theology which understands the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust political, economic, or social conditions. It has been described as "an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor's suffering, their struggle and hope, and a critique of society and the Catholic faith and Christianity through the eyes of the poor". The movement started in the late 1950's in Latin America. One of the movements lead characters Gustavo Gutierrez claimed that Latin America's ills were peculiar to that region, and were therefore seldom directly treated by western theologians. The theology of the Western world was simply irrelevant to the social and political conditions of Third World countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua, and Peru. Gutierrez's theology was an attempt to relate the eschatological message of freedom to the sociopolitical reality of Latin Americans. Gutierrez and other liberation theologians claimed that the truth of the Bible was found in its liberating potential, and that this truth was to be enacted by Christians through political and social praxis (action). The end goal of liberation theology was the realization of full economic and social equality and participation of all peoples in a utopian, harmonic and peaceful society.

Liberation theology has later inspired numerous movements throughout the world, therefore it is more correct to speak about liberation theologies. Oppressed groups have used their methodology in their own contexts. An example of this is the feminist liberation theology, which is presented in chapter five.

Letty Russel and Rosemary Radford Ruether began to develop a theology specific to the liberation of women. They based their theology on the liberation theology newly introduced in Latin America. They found many parallels between the condition of the Latin American people and the condition of women. Like liberation theology, feminist theology was written out of an experience of oppression in society.

The key to world liberation, according to the feminist theologians, was the liberation of the world's largest oppressed class namely women. Letty Russel's first goal of liberation was self-realized freedom for the oppressed, her second goal was a new communal social ethic. The final goal of liberation was the realization of a new humanity. Feminist theologians had a

vision for a new age and a paradisaal renewal of earth and society. Ruether and Russell argued that the Bible supported the liberation of women. The Bible pointed toward the freedom and integral personhood of woman. They advocated a new communal social ethic in which those who had already experienced freedom would struggle on behalf of other groups who had not yet experienced it. Ruether and Russell believed that the Kingdom of God would be realized when people achieved a new planetary humanity by harmonizing all dualisms.

Womanist theology is a theological movement which reconsiders the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies with a special lens to empower and liberate African women in America. Womanist theology associates with and departs from Feminist theology and Black theology. It is centered in the African American woman's reality and story, but it also embraces and stands in solidarity with all suppressed subjects. It is a theory and practice of inclusivity, accenting gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and ecology.

In the final chapter of this thesis I have tried to summarize what I have found in liberation theology and feminist liberation theology that can be a fruitful resource in the work with victims of rape. In short I argue that there are many subjects in traditional theology that is more of a burden to victims of rape than a source to liberation and healing. Feminist liberation theology offers a perspective on subjects like sin, shame, guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation, and suffering – that have a liberating potential. The methodology of liberation theology allows us to speak the truth about human life, and also to interpret theology in a way were liberation is the main focus, this has a healing function. In diaconal work with victims of rape this is especially important. Victims of rape experience that their life is shattered. Rape may provoke spiritual as well as physical and mental crises. As a diaconal church we must be able to present a theology that can help victims of rape rebuild their understandings of life, and promote healing and liberation. It is also important that we as diaconal workers dare to go to the barricades for victims of rape, - because this is still a vulnerable group in our society that need our attention and genuine care.

7.2 OUTLOOK

The work the Resource Center has started is in my eyes extremely important, and a good offer to victims of rape in Norway. The fact that their annual report states that they are not receiving sufficient funding tells me that we still have a lot of work to do before we have a satisfying diaconal work in our church for victims of sexual abuse. It is necessary to continue to press on and develop this work. It is also important that diaconal workers are informed

about, and also use, the resources available to them in this work. I also strongly believe that liberation theology and feminist theology offers a fruitful resource in the work with suppressed groups in general, and my hope is that theological faculties will teach these subjects in a larger extent. The status quo of today is that these theologies are still treated more like a subject for those who have a special interest in this field; my belief is that these are theologies that deserve more attention, as they are offering a view and methodology on theology that can be used fruitfully in a variety of different ways. Deacons and ministers must pay attention to what they are preaching. Is the theology presented liberating or is it an extra burden to vulnerable groups, such as victims of rape? Attention must be paid to how we preach about subjects such as sin, shame, guilt and forgiveness. The liberating message of the bible must be preached. The Norwegian Church's goal of going to the barricades for those who need justice and human rights globally as well as locally is in line with liberation theology, it is time that this theology gets the attention it deserves.

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