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# Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Men's Ministries and Patriarchy: From Sites of Perpetuation to Sites of Resistance

*Robert Berra*

Gendered violence is often described as a “women’s issue” because it is visited most often upon female victims by male perpetrators.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, given that the vast majority of gendered violence is perpetrated by men, it is imperative that such violence be considered a men’s issue too. Men are enabled by patriarchal social structures to feel entitled to use violence as a tool of domination, oppression, or correction against children, women, and other men. These social structures also maintain a system in which men who exercise such control are given the “benefit of the doubt” by other men, their acts of violence overlooked. Patriarchal strands running through the fabric of Christian theology, history, and practice bear a significant measure of responsibility for creating conditions that allow men to operate with this sense of entitlement to control and access others’ bodies. Within this Christian tradition, men’s ministries may play a role in perpetuating these strands. These ministries are affinity groups sponsored or supported by a faith community that restricts membership to men. The purpose of the ministry is typically to create a space in which men are engaged in the life of the faith community in ways tailored to masculine gender expression. There will often be a focus on forming men into a

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purported authentic expression of Christian manhood. Current literature on the recent proliferation of men's ministries, however, has also shown that these ministries urge men to live up to the expectations of a dominant and cis-heteronormative masculinity that perpetuates patriarchal norms in family and civic life. As such, these ministries—intentionally or not—can easily become incubators or carriers for narratives of control over women as well as the propagation of rape myths—incorrect but widely held misperceptions about rape—that help to sustain rape cultures. But what if one were to envision a ministry geared towards men that functioned as a site of resistance to patriarchal control and equipped members to confront gendered violence? This chapter will engage in such an envisioning.

Herein, I will consider the appeal and theoretical underpinnings of men's ministries, for it is vital to understand both what appeals to men who approach such ministry offerings and the needs these ministries purport to serve. This will be achieved by a close analysis of a recent appeal to churches to “invite men back” in order to correct what has been termed “the feminization of the church.” I will analyse David Murrow's *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (2005), which offers an example of the ambient level of sexism that claims to avoid patriarchal extremes; as such, it is a valuable conversation partner even if it is found wanting in liberative possibilities. I will then sketch the difficulties and prospects—both practical and theological—of developing a men's ministry as a site of resistance to rape culture. This will include thoughts towards reframing the kenotic model of life based on Christ relinquishing power in ways that aim to account for the power discrepancies woman and men experience in patriarchal society, particularly how women are asked to undergo kenosis—self-emptying humility, servanthood, and obedience patterned on Paul's formulation of Christ's incarnational self-giving (Phil. 2:5–11)—so that men do not have to do so.

### WHY RAPE CULTURE, AND WHY MEN'S MINISTRIES?

The complicity of religions with violence and patriarchal control over those who are not men (or do not meet an ideal standard of manhood) is well established. Sexism and homophobia often find support among religious communities in Western English-speaking countries, even as secularizing trends in those countries move populations towards greater toleration and affirmation of those traditionally oppressed. As Joan Timmerman once noted, religion is situated globally and possesses the

historical memory that makes it well placed to challenge the patriarchal structures that legitimate violence: “But is it so complicit with those structures that it cannot change them? How persistent is its ambivalence of word and action with regard to violence, especially violence against women?” (1993, p. 203). How might prevention of sexual violence look further than training women in how to avoid and/or cope with men’s violence and consider training men to actively relinquish the entitlement they feel to access others’ bodies? In a post-Christian context, in which women and men are leaving organized religion, how do churches garner credibility and an audience for this conversation?

These questions have interested me for some time and have become pressing in my role as an Episcopal priest and campus minister at Arizona State University—a university that has been under federal investigation for its inability to properly address sexual assault on campus, and that was once referred to as “the Harvard of Date Rape” on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (US Department of Education 2014; Comedy Central 2009). Indeed, in the United States since 2012, there seems to be a perceptibly louder, sustained conversation about sexual assault on college campuses and violence against women more generally. I support efforts on campus to raise awareness of sexual assault; my pastoral conversations will often touch on these subjects as they come up, and I have developed programmes about expressions of love and consent that I have presented to youth and young adult groups. All of this has been with the goal of providing a religious rationale for that which is often written off by a number of traditionalist or conservative Christians as stereotypical “political correctness run amok” and secular social justice infiltrating traditional Christianity.

There is need for this work. Rape culture is pervasive, including in churches. There is still a tendency to believe “our people don’t do that,” contributing to a denial of violence within our ranks (Timmerman 1993). Rape myths, such that victims are “asking for it” and that men “just can’t help themselves” continue to be passed on.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, traditional Christian teachings can provide raw material for the validation of women’s subordination and control, the policing of their sexual purity, and men’s proper role as head of the household (Adams 2005). While conservative pastors may be shocked at the domestic abuse occurring in their congregants’ households, it is often the logical outworking of those biblical teachings held as sacrosanct within their own traditions which reinforce male authority and female subordination.

In public cases of rape that make national media coverage, the prevalence of rape myths can cast doubt over the severity of the rape. These myths are believed within and beyond the church, and often serve to give the rapist the benefit of the doubt. One particular rape myth that reappears throughout this chapter is the tendency to hold women responsible for the emotions, actions, and reactions of men. Good women do not get raped, according to some strands of thought. Rape survivors are asked by others—including pastors and congregants—to account for how they might have contributed to their own victimization. Were they drinking? Is it possible the perpetrator simply misunderstood them? What were they wearing? If the rapist is their spouse, did they “unfairly” deny sex to them? Victims are also asked to consider the feelings and future of their attacker as they consider seeking recourse to justice through legal means—or to simply have the crime acknowledged as rape. Ministers and churches may urge rape and abuse victims to practice recovery and forgiveness at any hint of remorse from their attacker, which may or may not rise to the level of authentic repentance (Adams 2005, pp. 84–86). Perpetrators can rely upon the infrastructure of rape culture within their church to shift the moral locus of their actions onto victims, who are expected to be graceful, lenient, forgiving, and forgetful.

It was in my role as a campus minister that my attention was turned towards men’s ministries. An Episcopal Men’s Ministry steering committee asked for input about how they might go about attracting young men to their annual retreat. This request caused me to pause and reflect. First, while I am an advocate of safe spaces for marginalized groups (think “young women’s clergy group” or “Native/First Nations group”), I am viscerally suspicious of self-segregated groups for those who hold more social power in a given society. Too often my experiences of homogeneous groups of white men—or simply men—have been that these groups become places in which social power is actively consolidated over and against others, or places where purportedly progressive men can unapologetically engage in casual sexism.<sup>3</sup> A substantial amount of sifting must be done if one wants to develop material for teaching and reflection that is not sexist and patriarchal at its core, regardless of its outward appearance and aspirations.

But what if men’s ministries were to become a place where one can address masculinity in ways that promote health and equality? What if they were to become a place where men could learn to navigate the fear that they are losing power without regressing into demands for a reassertion of

that power (of which their families may bear the brunt)? What if they could be a place where men unlearn the narrow narrative of manhood that stunts human flourishing, and where the underpinnings of patriarchal forms of violence are challenged? Of course, this would be a departure from much of the context of current men's ministries. Assuming, however, that there is a desire to reach men who are inclined to a religious vision of equality and a world in which sexual violence is tackled at its roots, what would this look like?

### MEN'S MINISTRIES AND MALE SPIRITUALITY

According to what appears to be a rather cyclical occurrence, social commentators often speak about what seems to be a perpetual state of crisis in masculinity. Perhaps symbiotically, Christian calls to address the loss of a masculine sensibility within their own ranks go back at least to the Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911–1912 (Bederman 1989). As Joseph Gelfer (2009, p. 3) writes, “Two intertwining themes behind a popular understanding of the crisis are a disappearance of traditionally masculine characteristics and the pathologizing of those characteristics, both at the mercy of an increasingly feminized society.” A recent survey in the United States (Cox and Jones 2016) found that white Protestant evangelicals among other religious groups “stand out as the only one in which a majority (53%) agree that society has become too soft and feminine.” Meanwhile, “Approximately four in ten (42%) Americans agree that society as a whole has become too soft and feminine, while a slim majority (53%) disagrees” (ibid.).

The most authoritative voices of the contemporary Christian men's movement cluster around calls to reverse modern societies' attempts to “emasculate” men, address fatherlessness and the loss of initiation into responsible manhood, and remedy “leaderless” households. Much of the material harkens back to Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990) and the men's mythopoetic movement, and one can find echoes of the same concerns and arguments throughout men's ministry materials.<sup>4</sup> According to these voices, something authentic about masculinity is in danger of being lost or devalued and desperately needs to be reclaimed. There are frequent calls to recapture an understanding of archetypal roles for men (such as wise man, king, warrior, magician, and lover). Indeed, many proponents of men's ministries embrace some variation of sex role theory, which holds that maturity means individuals must fully subscribe to the traits designated



for their sex. Almost always, masculine spiritualities assume that there is a deficiency of masculinity that needs to be addressed. While sex role theory has given way to a more nuanced view which understands gender as a social construct, the idea of masculinity (and femininity) being divinely inspired and inherent to certain biological characteristics continues.

Examples of concern about emasculation are not hard to find. An interview given in 2006 by Mark Driscoll, a prominent and controversial American evangelical pastor, garnered attention for his complaint that, within today's church, the men are "nice, soft, tender, 'chick-ified' church boys ... 60% of Christians are chicks, and the 40% that are dudes are still sort of chicks ... it's just sad" (see Brage 2006; Cargill 2011). Driscoll continues: "You walk in and it's sea foam green, and fuchsia, and lemon yellow, and the whole architecture and the whole aesthetic is real feminine and the preacher's kinda feminine, and the music's kinda emotional and feminine." Driscoll and other like-minded Christian commentators, such as John Eldridge and Stu Weber, argue for the return of a Jesus who exhibits varying degrees of masculine wildness and a warrior's heroism, as opposed to the image of a meek and mild Jesus (see Eldredge 2001; Weber 1993). While many of these men acknowledge that Jesus was tender and caring, they believe that such an image has come at the exclusion of the Jesus who overturned the tables in the temple (Matt. 21:12–13) and who appears in the Book of Revelation clad in a blood-covered robe to vanquish his enemies (Rev. 19:13). Meanwhile, Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar and proponent of Christian mysticism, argues for the need to recover male initiation and mentorship, which would lead boys towards responsible manhood in keeping with the archetypal figures of king, warrior, prophet, and lover (2004). The main principle behind this mentorship is that men suffer from growing up with a father who is either physically or emotionally absent, and so lack a figure to guide them from boyhood into responsible manhood. Initiation therefore needs to be recovered for the good of society, so that men who "never grow up" do not perpetuate cycles of absent fatherhood and permanent adolescence (and the concomitant social problems that follow). In the midst of this, there is often a desire to re-establish male leadership (servant leadership and otherwise) within the household.

At the very least, contemporary Christian men's movements can be characterized as attempts to create spaces for men to seek their own forms of Christian study and practice. This need not in itself be a bad thing. Our physical markers of sex and gender will affect how we experience the world



and inform our use of religious tradition to make or find meaning. Ministry focused on men, however, may also include undercurrents addressing fears of both society's and the church's feminization by attempting to reassert male control in the household and forestall what is perceived as the progress of cultural emasculation. This in turn may lead these ministries to work towards a re-entrenchment of patriarchy.

### THE "FEMINIZATION" OF THE CHURCH

Much of the commentary generated by proponents of men's ministries is that these ministries are a way to reverse what has been called "the feminization of the church," both in demographics and in character. Women make up approximately 60 percent of an average Christian congregation (Pivic 2006). As such, there is considerable concern about how to attract men to church and keep them there. For instance, David Murrow, television producer, speaker, and author of *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (2005), notes that one characteristic declining churches share is that a disproportionate percentage of their congregations are women. In contrast, he writes, many *growing* churches are closer to demographic parity between men and women and allow a balance of the "masculine and feminine spirit" in church programmes and expressions of faith. He therefore believes that turning the tide on the "feminization of the church" is necessary for church growth and robust evangelization.

It is worth exploring Murrow's arguments in some detail, as he is representative of the efforts being made in a number of evangelical-leaning circles to "bring men back to church." His book *Why Men Hate Going to Church* is billed as a bestseller, and garnered hype and attention within Christian circles during both its initial publication in 2005 and the release of a revised edition in 2011. The book focuses on those themes and concerns central to the men's ministry movement; Murrow discusses men's fears of emasculation (albeit in more muted language than other conservative commentators), addresses both physical and spiritual fatherlessness, and offers tips on how to guide men into spiritual leadership of their families.

Of the hundreds of books about men's ministry in the US market, Murrow's book represents something of a "moderate" approach to cis-heteronormative gendered relationships and expressions of faith in the church.<sup>5</sup> By "moderate," I mean that Murrow's goal is one of balance and practicality, not male domination or an "idealized" world in which men

have relegated women and children to inferior positions under their unquestioned authority. To use the term “moderate” is not to assume any self-evident virtue in taking a middle path between two extreme positions, or to affirm the oft-heard notion that in the middle the truth is found. I am simply saying that Murrow believes his position avoids the two extremes that have arisen in previous debates: on the one hand, patriarchal control (including spousal abuse) and, on the other, what he believes to be women’s propensity to “neuter” men. Murrow’s middle ground, however, overlooks the patriarchal underpinnings of these extreme positions and assumes an equality of power and influence between men and women that does not exist. Within this moderate position, he nevertheless remains steeped in an ambient level of societal sexism and gender essentialism, offering ways to reach men located in this same milieu. Murrow notes, for instance, that men may wish to avoid being perceived as “feminine”; the Church, he argues, should therefore consider dropping vocabulary and phrases that can be interpreted as “feminine” and consequently a threat to manhood (2005, pp. 135–136). This includes reevaluating the use of the term “saved”:

Although Jesus used the term *saved* a number of times in the Gospels, only twice did he pronounce someone *saved* (Luke 7:50; 9:9). But he called many to *follow Him*. Hear the difference? *Follow* gives a man something to do. It suggests activity rather than passivity. But *being saved* is something that happens to damsels in distress. It’s the feminine role. So why not use a descriptor that Jesus preferred? By calling men to follow Jesus, we put Christ’s offer in active terms that appeal to everyone—especially men. (p. 136, original italics)

Murrow makes a number of similar suggestions about “de-feminizing” faith communities, including their liturgy, musical choices, ministries, décor, and pastoral care. These suggestions seek to keep men secure in their masculinity, and avoid being considered in any way “feminine” or (even worse) “gay.”

Many men’s ministries operate at this “moderate” level. As Gelfer notes, members of such ministries

can be puzzled when they are charged with being patriarchal because it is not necessarily their intention to manifest ... patriarchy. However, the net effect of building masculinity around, for example, archetypes or servant leadership is a tendency toward ... patriarchy. We are asked by these men, in

all sincerity, to accept their warrior identification and claims to servant leadership with the gentlemanliness with which it is intended, not the despotism to which it can succumb. (2009, pp. 10–11)

In other words, there may be little awareness of the patriarchal underpinnings of these ministries; as such, they become quiet carriers of the baggage of patriarchy, and, as I shall discuss further, rape culture.

Yet, the distinction between extreme and moderate forms of patriarchal assertion is often a difference of degree rather than of kind. While Murrow claims that he is seeking balance, it is impossible to take his recommendations as anything other than a reassertion of patriarchal power; many of his suggestions simply indulge men's fears of their waning influence rather than providing alternative expressions of faith or addressing concerns of declining congregations.<sup>6</sup> For example, he admits that this topic is "very hard" for him to write about, because "I believe in the equality of the genders. Nevertheless, if we're going to bring men back into full participation, we must do a better job of nurturing male lay leadership ... and placing men in visible leadership positions." In other words, Murrow affirms gender equality, while at the same time validating the "need" to act against this at every opportunity, all in the name of sustaining church membership.

Still, Murrow's moderate patriarchy can occasionally make space to question assumptions about what it means to be a man in theological and cultural terms. He does offer a critique of masculinity as a "rival religion," where a man's "work, his hobbies, his entertainments, his follies, his addictions, everything he does is designed to prove to the world *he is a man*" (2005, p. 3, original italics). Murrow notes a number of problematic features of contemporary masculinity, which he argues can keep men away from Christianity: men may be afraid of emasculation due to loss of power or control; they may worry about being thought of as insufficiently masculine (or "gay"); they may be concerned about not being seen to "score" in the sexual arena; they may dread appearing theologically incompetent (given women are considered the religious virtuosos); and they may fear being invited to share too much of their inner lives too soon (Murrow 2005, pp. 115–125). Nevertheless, Murrow's project in this book is to create a church that is attractive to cis-heteronormative men, rather than inviting men to reflect critically on the potential problematics of such a model of masculinity. For, according to Murrow, any attempts to "make men better"—that is, to conform men to an "ideal" imagined by the women in their lives—are nothing more than a stumbling block to men entering the church.

While Murrow takes a positive approach to men's ministries, he would prefer to infuse the whole church with the "masculine spirit" in order to reach a greater audience. That is, he would rather reach all the men who attend church services on Sunday morning than a select few attending a discrete men's ministry programme. Pre-emptively replying to critics who would challenge his claim that the church reflects feminine concerns and priorities, Murrow writes:

For years, the experts have told us that church is a men's club. Feminists condemn the church as hierarchical and male-dominated. Academics view the church as too patriarchal. Reformers complain that the language of the Bible and hymns is sexist and excludes women. Liberals accuse certain churches of oppressing women by refusing to allow them to become pastors or elders. The media have a field day anytime the word *submission* is uttered by a church leader. ... [Nevertheless] the church can be seen as either male or female dominated. If you look at the relatively thin stratum of professional clergy, then the church *is* male dominated. But if you look at lay leadership, lay participation, and ideal Christian values, Christianity is female dominated. ... It looks male dominated on the surface, but inside it's feminine in every way. (Murrow 2005, pp. 24–25, original italics)

Because Murrow believes women are the ones truly in charge of the churches, though supposedly unaware of such control, he writes that his book is principally for them. He appeals to them specifically as the ones who can either make the changes that would bring men back *or* stand in the way of such change:

Women must humble themselves, pray, and allow the men of the church to lead the body toward an adventure. ... Women, will you allow yourselves to be swept into this adventure, or will you stick with the predictable ... will you allow men to take risks, dream big, and push the envelope within your local congregation? God made men for adventure, achievement, and challenge, and if they can't find those things in church, they're going to find them somewhere else. But if you allow your church to embark on a great adventure, the men will return. (2005, p. 11)

Note the echoes of kenosis towards which Murrow counsels women. He assumes that women have taken the church "off course" and so echoes the age-old expectation that women humble and empty themselves. Women would have to sacrifice their own gifts of ministry in order to make room

for men and thus restore balance. Elsewhere (2008, p. 140) he invites women (particularly feminists) to consider the changes that he suggests are an “affirmative action program that will increase diversity,” since, “in church, men are the minority group.”<sup>7</sup> In such a scenario, women must undergo kenosis in humility and obedience; men, meanwhile, have no such requirement.

Once again, Murrow is adamant throughout the book that his work is not about reasserting a male-dominated church, but about restoring “balance” (2005, pp. 9–10). He defines the masculine and feminine spirits in well-worn stereotypical and essentialist ways, citing the pop-psychology bestseller *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (p. 24). The masculine spirit is characterized by traits such as power, competence, accomplishment, goals, and competition. Conversely, the feminine spirit exemplifies love, communication, relationships, support, sharing, and feelings. He writes, “to be truly healthy ... every congregation needs a generous helping of both the feminine spirit and the masculine spirit. You see this balance in churches that are growing today. A masculine concern for quality, effectiveness, and achievement pervades everything they do ... yet they are supportive, nurturing, and tender with people” (pp. 25–28). Murrow thus claims to advocate for balance between masculine and feminine spirits within the church, insisting that too much of either leads to different forms of spiritual abuse. Too much of the masculine spirit causes legalism, and thus leads to faith bound in fear and anxiety over the performative aspects of Christian practice. There is little grace in this, he argues, since the expression of the spiritual life becomes about little more than what one can do for God (or the leader of the congregation) and earning God’s favour. Murrow admits such a spirit can provide theological justification for physical abuse, relating a story of a friend who was being abused by her husband. She was read scripture advocating submission, accused of “rebelliousness,” and told by her pastor to return to her spouse who suffered no ill consequences for the violence he perpetrated.

By contrast, Murrow suggests that an excess of the feminine spirit in churches can lead to spiritual passivity, sentimentality, avoidance of conflict, and a focus on comfort; in essence a stagnation of faith. Murrow concludes that, to many men, “church is for women, children, and wimps,” and “men will not be tamed by a program based exclusively upon feminine virtues” (2005, p. 28). However, “men will gladly be tamed by an organization with a masculine spirit ... the military, sports teams, and even street gangs have no problem attracting enthusiastic men.”



Murrow acknowledges that his principal concern is reaching men “where they are” as opposed to where the church thinks men “ought to be.” His goal is to eliminate what he calls the practical barriers to men’s participation in church, and purports to show the *distance* between men’s needs and the ministries of local churches (2005, p. 10). Murrow’s work, however, is awash with essentialist understandings of gender and how gender is constructed—as a man I find it offensively so. He is either being coy or is woefully ignorant about how his vision of “balance” is anything other than a complementarian, softer form of patriarchal control. Many of the complaints he makes about the state of liturgical expression and ineffective ministries can be stated just as accurately, if not more accurately, if gender expression were taken out of the equation. One could argue that the malaise exhibited by many American denominations and churches has more to do with adherence to models that *maintain* the system as it existed under Christian hegemony. And while many of his suggestions for encouraging men back to church have merit for the missionally minded, they are needlessly couched in adherence to his “masculine spirit” and “feminine spirit” binary.

Further, the notion that the church has become feminized and so “needs correction” is itself a sexist view—or at the very least it is a genuflection to a sexist view in its willingness to conform the church to the ambient level of sexism within society. Murrow fails to recognize ways in which the disengagement of men from churches could just as easily be sexist conditioning rather than men finding that “the feminine” does not speak to them—this betrays his complete lack of awareness of the political reality of his project.<sup>8</sup> For instance, he tells us that men like competition, so we should include friendly competition into the life of the church; yet we are also advised to avoid situations in which women could best men, as this would be “emasculating” (2005, p. 155). Murrow fails to explain why men trying to “best” other men is good, yet women succeeding against men would be bad. He ignores the ways that sexism conditions men to consider women unworthy opponents (or leaders!) and hence why the loss of face or perceived emasculation is more keenly felt. Women once again are advised to throttle back expression of their knowledge for fear men will feel themselves as lesser—men may know deep down that they have some things to learn, but should never be confronted with that reality by a woman.

Relatedly, Murrow notes that denominations with women clergy experience greater gender gaps (2005, p. 172). In Murrow’s estimation, the



ordination of women and the placement of women into visible leadership roles speeds along the exodus of men from those denominations, because they may go weeks without seeing their own sex represented in the service. This can easily be chalked up to the sexist devaluation of women's work, though Murrow frames it more as an issue of representation. He claims women clergy may be "too liberal" in their theology and social views compared to men (2005, p. 173). But, given that sexism is listed as a concern for these women, it could very well be the case that men are made uncomfortable by being confronted with facts about sexism—and their *own* sexism—and therefore absent themselves from an uncomfortable situation. Yet Murrow fails to consider this in his discussion.

While Murrow charges that the "feminine spirit" has made the church too considerate of people's feelings and wishes, he counsels women towards a hyper-awareness of the fears, desires, and needs of men. He does not consider how addressing sexism is a theological issue—an imperative flowing from a liberative understanding of the gospel and ministry of Jesus Christ. He speaks of the impact of women clergy without acknowledging the possibility that these clergy face a considerable amount of sexism and sexual harassment from colleagues and men in their congregations. More often than not, he believes true equality can be sacrificed to cater to the sexist whims of men in an evangelistic gambit—he points to where those concessions have paid off and where he has personally counselled women to give up equality to make men more comfortable.

Is there wheat among this chaff? Yes, in the same way that a broken clock tells the correct time twice a day. He is right to say that there is a trend of men leaving organized religion at a faster rate than women, although the gender gap of those leaving organized religious observance is closing (McClendon 2016). And, while Murrow may over-signify the importance of gender in relation to this issue, he does at least hint at the significance of social class and education in illuminating ways. Many of the characteristics of men whose gender presentation codes them as more effeminate or "churchy" may correlate to higher social status and higher education levels, while characteristics of "rough-and-tumble manly" men may correlate to blue-collar men of lower social status or education levels. These divides are worth considering, as strategies for church outreach to men are developed. There is also merit to Murrow's concerns that stagnation and loss of a sense of mission are current problems within many congregations. Why belong to an organization that has no credible account of why it continues to exist? As such, a number of practical sug-

gestions Murrow makes with regard to this issue are attractive in the sense that they call people into the world to serve and make a difference.

For all its faults, Murrow's work and other similar statements by evangelical and Roman Catholic church leaders have prompted people to ask the question: "Is there actually a feminization of the church; and, if so, is there actually anything wrong with this?" My short answer to both of these questions is "yes, and no." There is nothing in itself wrong with the church being coded as feminine. Yet, too often, women are held responsible for the reactions of men who interpret women's *gains* as a loss of *their* power; when one is accustomed to privilege, equality can feel like oppression.<sup>9</sup> My own vision of ministry and my context prompts me to then ask a number of other questions.<sup>10</sup> Most pertinent to our conversation are these: masculinity as it is culturally conditioned rests on privilege and is upheld by violence—can Christianity, then, offer a critique of masculinity? Are we willing to make men angry if we challenge those forms of masculinity? If the answer is yes, then how much sexism is the church willing to tolerate before it reaches and teaches men about the freedom in Christ that also liberates them from the patriarchal expectations and behaviours which ensnare them? How much sexism will the church abide while in the process of reaching and teaching these men? How do we create a church environment in which women are not required to undergo a kenotic emptying of their own lives to spare men from their own kenotic work—emptying themselves of the unearned power society bestows upon them? And in so doing, giving up such power would cut down all recourse to the use of violence in maintaining male supremacy—including rape and other forms of gendered violence.

### THE DIFFICULTIES AND POSSIBILITIES OF A DIFFERENT KIND OF MEN'S MINISTRY

In this section, I outline three difficulties, of many, in designing a men's ministry that can serve as a site of resistance to rape culture and patriarchal control. The first difficulty is that, as is amply shown earlier, much of the appeal of men's ministries is that they tap into a desire to make meaning of—and then reassert—what it means to be a man. Often these meanings are heavily conditioned by patriarchal assumptions, even if the men involved do not see themselves as contributing to oppression, but rather getting in touch with a deeper sense of themselves. The making of mean-

ing in which these ministries engage often relies on a conformity to assigned gender roles; to help gird men's sense of their "true" selves, they are encouraged to trust in—and attain—conventional masculinity. Pointing out to these men that gender is performative may not be enough to overthrow accounts of masculinity with seemingly divine, archetypal, and biological attributions. In some Christian settings, the patriarchal strands of understanding gender and familial relations are upheld as an element of the timeless quality of God's instruction for humankind evoked in biblical traditions; challenging those modes of biblical interpretation therefore needs to be part of the conversation. Such a conversation may be a nonstarter in traditions that may resist attempts to reframe biblical interpretations in more liberative lights, but this interpretive work is a necessary step prior to advocating for the relinquishing of patriarchal power.

Another difficulty is that men's ministries provide comfort and direction to men who feel like they are "losing" in societies where economic structures render their own positions more tenuous. Men may also be reacting to having their own concerns and desires ever so slightly decentred. A reassertion of power and influence is a knee-jerk reaction that nevertheless finds sustained appeal. Further, work like Murrow's allows men and women to believe they are achieving balance, even as patriarchal control is the logical outworking of following Murrow's suggestions. Such a ministry programme appeals to those who believe that any point between extremes of regressive patriarchal authoritarianism and total obliteration of gender categories is self-evidently good—and just as good as equality (even if men are still in charge for the sake of attracting more men into ministry).

Lastly, a common reaction to the notion that violence against women is a men's issue is defensiveness—so much so that "not all men" is an utterly predictable response to any criticism of men as a collective. Women who express an opinion about the prevalence of rape (and how men make up the vast majority of rapists) will often be reminded that "not all men" are rapists. It is a defensive rhetorical tactic, characterized by the one who utters the phrase as an effort to keep "perspective." It is, however, also a way for men to distance themselves from any sense of collective responsibility for the rape culture in which we live. It is crucial that effective ways to neutralize the "not all men" defence mechanism be developed because it contributes to the shifting of the moral locus of rape from perpetrators to those who are most often the victims. Instead of focusing on those who rape, the "not all men" defence allows men to police (often women's and

victims') *reactions* to rape rather than address the mechanisms that allow rape to continue. There can be little progress with dismantling a rape culture when men are not willing or able to interrogate their own garnered benefits and complicity in minimizing the moral responsibility of those who abuse others.

I have argued that David Murrow's work represents a rather narrow understanding of masculinity and sex roles, and he patterns his recommendations for new ministries based on those understandings. Without giving credence to his dismissive "this is just how men are" claims, it is nevertheless possible to translate some of his more practical suggestions in ways that could be geared towards men who variously adhere to patriarchal norms. Such a consideration has merit given the continuously shrinkingsphere of influence organized religion has in Western contexts—churches can no longer assume an audience and so they have to re-establish their credibility and relevance. Given that our sexist society offers men a stilted range of emotions and roles to play, some of Murrow's suggestions on how to approach men in ways that speak to their cultural conditions without concomitantly throttling women's ministry may indeed have merit. For instance, a congregation that could invite men to participate in wider community service projects and tasks with concrete goals will be more attractive to men, as well as opening avenues of conversation (my experience is that such things are attractive to many regardless of sex or gender identity). Opportunities for service—such as direct aid to the homeless or building shelters and homes—are valuable not least because they offer the possibility of building relationships through a shared mission and utilizing gifts beyond those necessary for most experiences of church on Sunday morning. There is value in cultivating such relationships authentically, for it is through relationships that trust is built and hard truths can be heard. Those of us in churches who wish to reach and teach men need to acknowledge the less-than-flourishing environment of hypermasculinity and sexism may need to enter and engage in order to earn a hearing. There are many men's ministry leaders who desire to reach these same men in order to initiate them into their cis-heteronormative brands of patriarchal reimagining; we should be prepared to encounter and engage meaningfully with their strongly held oppressive notions, and their insistence that they represent the truest expression of Christian gender norms.

Alongside service opportunities, men's groups could be formed to support men who are seeking to express a spiritual life amenable to a praxis of social justice. These men need support as they may be regarded suspi-

ciously both by those who resist religious narratives *and* by those religious voices with a stake in perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. Such groups would need to offer an account of what it means to be a man without merely negating the traditional, patriarchal view. There would have to be a positive account of manhood (in other words, what theological meaning could be given to men's existence that could replace the patriarchal roles these men would be invited to deny?).<sup>11</sup> It is still worth asking whether such a theology is possible—but in the meantime, how shall we live? One practical example would be to create a dad's group for men who desire to be more involved in their children's lives, despite patriarchal expectations that still allow them to absent themselves or push the majority of responsibility onto their spouse. Such a programme would form a network of support for men who are committed to challenging patriarchal norms, while giving them the tools to pass such knowledge onto their children.<sup>12</sup>

Joan Timmerman once wrote that “the traditional acts of mercy need to be updated to fit our times. More often than not, the wounded individual found at the side of the road by the Good Samaritan is a woman” (1993, p. 208). To take this insight somewhat literally, efforts could be made to train men in bystander interventions. The younger such training begins, the better. High schoolers—if not younger children—can expect to be in situations where they may need to know how to intervene on behalf of someone if sexual violence becomes a threat or a reality. This occurs even if parents do not want to consider the possibility that their children may find themselves in such a situation.

Biblical interpretation and Christian tradition have often considered the protection of women as an outworking of women's subjugation under men. It is worth saying that a more liberative tack will find the parable of the Good Samaritan's operative question of “who is my neighbour?” a better starting point. Whereas a number of programmes aimed at the prevention of sexual misconduct will ask men “What if it was your wife/mother/sister/daughter?” thereby trying to activate a transferring of feelings of care, such designations should not matter. Everyone deserves help in dangerous situations. Everyone is a neighbour, regardless of relationship or gender, by virtue of their shared humanity in the image of God.<sup>13</sup> However, such programmes could capitalize on the notion of being a chivalric protector to bring interested men into conversation; the *reframing* of such viewpoints could then receive a hearing.



## WHAT WOULD A MODEL OF KENOTIC EXAMINATION OFFER?

Earlier, I wrote about the need to offer a theological and anthropological account of men and masculinity beyond the mere negation of traditional patriarchy. One theological resource to such a conversation is the concept of kenosis, which is an outworking of Paul's formulation from Philippians of "Christ's incarnational self-emptying in terms of motifs of servanthood, self-humbling, and obedience unto death" (Keller 1990, p. 105). Kenosis has been subject to considerable debate recently, particularly in feminist theology. In short, the debate centres on whether kenosis can ever offer anything other than an oppressive mode of being in women's spiritual lives and lived experience. Under guidance from ministers, women have been told for centuries to humble themselves to the point of diminution; such commands have advocated women's humility and obedience within abusive situations, justifying this as some farcical imitation of Christ's own suffering death. Still, one contribution to this conversation is the reality that patriarchy has provided us with a clear understanding of what the kenotic process is *not*.

The kenotic process requires us to ask the question: who has something of which they can be emptied? Where patriarchy overinflates and centres the relative importance of men's concerns, desires, and agency, kenosis requires setting aside such corrupting power. To return to the thread of rape culture we have been following, such a concept of kenosis would be helpful for addressing the conditioning of patriarchy by which women are made responsible for the actions and feelings of men. Within patriarchal systems, women are often directed to consider how their actions might affect the goals and projects of men, with the implication that they must sacrifice themselves (experience kenosis, in Christian settings) to further these goals and projects.

We see this kenotic expectation of women in Murrow's work, in which women must step back from the fullness of their own religious expression to make room for men to return and lead. The request that is *not* made is for men to set aside *their* need to lead and return instead on *their* own terms; this effectively denies men the space to enter into the kenotic process. Murrow's expectation is mirrored in rape cases in which the future of the rapist is opined upon in piteous tones, with less attention given to healing or justice for the victim.<sup>14</sup> In such a framework, it is more important that the women divest themselves of what little power they



might have than that men set aside their current power. Indeed, the request is even more horrific in that women are often asked to set aside the small remainder of their current power for the possibility of men having *more* power in the future. Each of these requests, for women to enter into the kenotic process on behalf of men, is thus also a request for men to *avoid* this kenotic process.

If we are to ask, then, why there might be a “feminization of the church,” what we discover is that patriarchy, and by extension the men’s ministries it influences, denies men entry into the essential kenotic process in any meaningful way. Instead, it forces women to partake of a false kenosis, where they are required to set aside things which are not even within their sphere of control. Women do *not* have the ability to empty themselves of the actions and feelings of men; only men have the ability to enter into that kenotic process. Nor is it fair to ask women to undergo this ultimately twisted process of carrying the burden of another’s kenotic work. A conception of kenosis blinded by patriarchal reality creates a system where men do not take up their own cross and follow Christ but, instead, forces women onto the crosses of men—and so into mutuality with Jesus. Christ is feminine because patriarchy requires men to become crucifiers. This is spiritual rape. It denies women the capacity to enter into kenotic process with consent and respect, just as rape strips women of those very same realities. The invitation to enter into the kenotic process and experience a consensual and respectful relationship with Jesus is rendered optional for men, because men are given recourse to place demands on others while never entering a space that questions the terms and conditions they put on their own participation in the life of Christ. This is the power claimed by rapists and crucifiers.

What if men’s ministries called men to enter into the kenotic process, to take up their crosses, to follow Christ, and name those things which are in their sphere of control, such as rape, as theirs to own and theirs to set aside? What if kenosis for men meant giving up the power to continuously shift the moral locus away from themselves? What if it required men to humble themselves by engaging in the moral inventories from which patriarchy can typically shield a man? There are possibilities here, possibilities that can transform men’s ministry and all men, possibilities that if learned amidst the horrors of patriarchy can be readily applied to other systems of oppression and abuse that systematically compromise our society from entering into an abundant life with Christ. Such a men’s ministry would be host to a difficult purgative process, but it would be a ministry that

does not sacrifice truth for comfort. Such a ministry would take seriously the sins that are particular to men and recognize men's violence as an issue worthy of confronting.

## NOTES

1. There is considerable debate whether one should use the term "survivor" or "victim" when referring to a person who has been raped. Throughout this chapter I will use the term "victim." There are a number of reasons I make this choice. First, the act of rape is a crime and a sin that *victimizes*. It is a horror-inducing affront to the body, mind, and soul of the one who is raped. Rape victimizes; rape does not *create* survivors. Individuals who have been raped may survive the assault, and the language an individual may choose to adopt for their life after the assault is a personal expression of how they understand their moving forward. I have no objection to the term "survivor" being adopted by those who are healing after rape. Second, it is imperative to keep the victimizing nature of the act in view since this chapter focuses on men—who make up the majority of perpetrators of rape—and ideologies that influence the prevalence of rape. Survivorship is a state of being that is best not presupposed in the context of my argument since I will address ways in which Christian theologies may minimize the harm of rape.
2. For closer examinations of the ways larger society and the Christian tradition continue to perpetuate rape myths, see Blyth (2010), especially Chap. 1, and Messina-Dysert (2015), especially Chap. 2 and pp. 72–74.
3. I am from the American South, and while I am sure this happens elsewhere, I quickly became accustomed to conversations white men will have only with other white men about the consolidation or reclaiming of power, and resentment towards others who are perceived as threatening to undermine that power. It should be said here that there is a significant difference between a place where those with power learn about their role in the oppressions of others but make mistakes, all the while working under the commitment to do better, as compared to a space in which people feel free to indulge their prejudices.
4. The mythopoetic movement holds that there are a number of archetypes for masculinity that are hard-wired into men, including king, warrior, prophet, and lover. The movement suggests that men's connection to these deep-seated understandings of who men are has been lost. It is believed that through forces of modernity, such as a rise in fatherlessness and the feminization of culture, men need to be reinitiated into true manhood through a rediscovery of these ways of being. Joseph Gelfer (2009)

offers a comprehensive analysis of trends within men's ministries from 1990 to 2010. His analysis includes an examination of the connections between—and the uniqueness of—the men's mythopoetic movement, the evangelical men's movement, the Catholic men's movement, and gay spiritualities.

5. Murrow published a revised edition of his book in 2011 which includes material found in his earlier books, articles, and other sources. One major difference between the two editions includes a broadening of audience. While he explicitly addressed the 2005 edition to laywomen, the 2011 edition envisions a more generalized audience. This is partly because he has also published follow-ups to the 2005 edition for women entitled *How Women Help Men Find God* (2008) and *What Your Husband Isn't Telling You: A Guided Tour of a Man's Body, Soul, and Spirit* (2012). As a result of this diffusion of material, some of the explicit calls for women to throttle back their own spiritual life to make room for men (which were more explicit in the 2005 edition of *Why Men Hate Going to Church*) were removed or softened in the 2011 edition. He acknowledges that the first edition was criticized for "blaming women," but believed that he had been clear about not placing blame on women, men, or pastors. But, given how he explicitly calls women the "gatekeepers" to bringing men back to the church, it is easy to see why his ultimatum to women to allow the church to change could rightfully be seen as laying responsibility upon them; and, where there is a responsibility, it follows that blame can be assigned for failing to live up to that responsibility. There is also the matter that, in the 2011 edition, even as he claims to not assign blame in the introduction (p. xiv), he opens chapter 25 with the question "Who's to blame for Christianity's gender gap? Men? Women? Pastors? Musicians? Authors? Businessmen? Yes" (p. 219). Unless otherwise noted, the rest of this chapter follows the 2005 edition, as the 2011 edition shows no discernible difference in viewpoint, and it is valuable to consider Murrow's address to women.
6. Indeed, Murrow notes elsewhere that his goal is "not 50–50 balance ... a church that wants to grow will tip the balance slightly toward the masculine ... [it] should speak with a masculine accent (2008, p. 25)." He argues that this can be done without alienating women, who are allowed to cross into masculine pursuits with their reputations intact, while men lose stature among other men more easily for acting "feminine."
7. This strategy of using vocabulary familiar in social justice settings to plead with women (particularly feminists) to consider the author's point of view is not new. Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos (1992, p. 225) advised in their first edition of *The Wild Man's Journey*—and in their most recent rewrite *From Wild Man to Wise Man* (2005, p. 12)—"Today, God's sons

are without dignity, self-confidence, true power. We look like the oppressors, dear sisters, but have no doubt we are really the oppressed.” These statements pit men’s and women’s claims about who is oppressed against each other. Consider how Rohr and Martos’s statement would change if they had instead written “have no doubt that we *are also* oppressed,” thereby recognizing that patriarchy is also harmful to men (though much more harmful to those who do not fall into the category of unambiguously and conventionally male). The difference between Murrow’s and Rohr and Martos’s use of this strategy is that Murrow gives what seems to be a light-hearted, self-deprecating hand-wave to the trap within which masculinity leaves men ensnared, and talks about utilizing this for evangelistic purposes; Rohr and Martos speak of being trapped at the top of society by false promises of power by “the system” and ask what transformation would look like. This is in keeping with their respective projects. Murrow is trying to get men in the door and committed to the church, while Rohr and Martos are pointing towards processes of transformation. Still, the framing of both arguments is that there is a power struggle in which women must give way to bring about the full flourishing of men.

8. Gelfer (2009, p. 184) writes that “a significant amount of the conservatism in masculine spirituality is not necessarily about actively pursuing a conservative agenda, but rather having seemingly no political awareness that their project is conservative to begin with, even conservative to the extreme. It is this lack of awareness which results in the often-genuine puzzlement in the face of criticism: why are King and Warrior archetypes or servant leaders patriarchal, they seem to ask, we’re just decent guys who want to do right by our family and friends? It is this lack of awareness that enables men to engage with scenes of paramilitary fantasy [common in some men’s ministries] without asking questions about what it actually suggests beyond some natural signifier of masculinity.” Gelfer speaks of varying degrees of conservatism whereas I have here introduced “moderate” to delineate differing patriarchal aspirations.
9. The adage “when one is accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression” has been attributed to a number of people, but there is no consensus on who first uttered it.
10. Some of these questions can be found in Berra (2015). Other pertinent questions include does masculinity inherently deserve to exist, no matter what its content? In denominations or churches that ordain women and LGBTQIA folk, can we affirm “masculinity” without reifying the sins of sexism and heterosexism?
11. For an example of a better (yet still cis-heteronormative) attempt to define manhood biblically in a Reformed/Evangelical setting without reifying hypermasculinity, see Pyle (2015). Gelfer (2009) points to some further

possibilities arising out of gay spiritualities (see especially Chap. 6 and conclusion).

12. This practical example came from a conversation with Reverend Jordan Ware in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth.
13. I have yet to see “what if he was your brother/father/etc.” as a way of addressing the rape of men. It may be just as well, since I here argue for a universal recognition that all genders deserve protection and advocacy, but the silence also speaks volumes about how far we have to go to address the rape of men.
14. An example of this is the light sentence Stanford swimmer Brock Turner received after being convicted in 2015 on three felony charges of sexually assaulting an unconscious woman. Prosecutors asked the judge for a sentence of six years in prison. The judge sentenced Turner to six months, and Turner was released after three months in jail. The judge said in his sentencing statement that a harsher punishment would “have a severe impact” and “adverse collateral consequences” on Turner’s life (see Levin 2016). More pointedly, Turner’s father—in defence of lighter sentencing—wrote to the court that Turner’s “life will never be the one he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve. That is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life.” See Miller (2016).

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