

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

TROTHEN, TRACY J, *Linking Sexuality & Gender: Naming Violence against Women in The United Church of Canada*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 2003, ix +155p. Index.

Violence in religious households is a topic of growing interest to many domestic violence researchers. This book fits within the larger body of literature on violence against women in Christian homes; it traces the United Church of Canada's (UCC) views on gender and sexuality during the twentieth century. The documented views provide a framework for understanding the Church's positions that have influenced views related to violence against women within congregational families. Tracy Trothen, a feminist social ethicist, draws on Church institutional archives consisting of Records of Proceedings (ROPs), and case studies including *In God's Image . . . Male and Female; Gift, Dilemma and Promise*, and the Task Force on the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society (TFWM). This book analyses the views expressed in these documents and provides the author's interpretation and critique.

Through examination of official Church documentation, Trothen explores the perceptions of gender and sexuality within the UCC and outlines patriarchal dualistic theology. This book traces the denominational approach to human sexuality from a period when, according to Trothen, Church views did little to discourage violence against women within congregational homes. Trothen's analysis begins with a period when sexuality, considered a ". . . means to greater end of family and national unity" (p. 16), was deemed primarily for procreation and well-being within the marriage relation, to the eventual challenging of the goodness of the family, questioning of the assumptions of consent in marital intercourse, and acknowledgement of sexual relationships outside of marriage. According to Trothen's analysis of the archival documents, along the way, the Church addressed issues such as birth control, redemptive homes and pornography; her study also reveals potentially contentious issues including Biblical interpretation relating to human sexuality, fidelity and homosexuality. Trothen points out that policies adopted by the UCC, such as 1960s views on contraception and abortion, often preceded adoption by general Canadian society.

Trothen argues that while the UCC may have taken progressive steps in terms of views on marriage and sexuality, it lagged behind Canadian society in addressing power imbalances in intimate relationships. She suggests that Church views on gender and sexuality delayed its official

recognition of violence against women. Her further criticisms of the UCC's policies include a lack of a woman feminist perspective and failure to address the glorification of suffering. Trothen also provides a critique of Church's discourse, arguing for clarification on the Church's position on family violence; she proposes that the UCC must firmly insist that partner abuse destroys the marriage covenant.

This well-written book provides a critical analysis of the UCC documents related to sexuality, gender and marriage. While the author clearly identifies possible weaknesses with her selected research methodologies, I believe she is successful in placing the UCC in the context of wider Canadian society. Given that the audience will likely include individuals unfamiliar with theological doctrines specific to the UCC, perhaps the provision of additional insights and relevant overviews may have proven helpful.

Clearly, Trothen furthers our understanding of the progress made within one denomination in its journey toward the elimination of sexism and violence against women. This book may provide inspiration to feminists of other denominational affiliations yet to make the progress of the UCC, and may lead to further dialogue between religious workers and those working in the area of domestic violence. It will be especially interesting to researchers and students studying family violence in religious homes, and well as individuals interested in the UCC's history as it relates to marriage and sexuality.

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