

Proverbs of Ashes : Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us

By Rita Nakashima Brock, Rebecca Ann Parker

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Rebecca Parker was a young minister in Seattle when a woman walked into her church and asked if God really wanted her to accept her husband's beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross. Parker knew, at that moment, that if she were to answer the woman's question truthfully she would have to rethink her theology. And she would have to think hard about some of the choices she was making in her own life.

When Rita Nakashima Brock was a young child growing up in Kansas, kids taunted her viciously, calling her names like "Chink" or "Jap." She learned to pretend that she did not feel the sting of scorn and the humiliation of contempt. The solitude and silence of her suffering-decreed by both her mother's Japanese culture and her father's Christian heritage-kept the wound alive.

It was the gap between knowledge born of personal experience and traditional theology that led Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker to write this emotionally gripping and intellectually rich exploration of the doctrine of the atonement. Using an unusual combination of memoir and theology in the tradition of Augustine's Confessions, they lament the inadequacy of how Christian tradition has interpreted the violence that happened to Jesus. Ultimately, they argue, the idea that the death of Jesus on the cross saves us reveals a sanctioning of violence at the heart of Christianity.

Brock and Parker draw on a wide array of intimate stories about family violence, the sexual abuse of children, racism, homophobia, and war to reveal how they came to understand the widespread damage being done by this theology. But the authors also undertake their own arduous and unexpected journeys to recover from violence and to assist others to do so. On these journeys they discover communities that begin to give them the strength to question the destructive ideas they have internalized, and the strength to seek out an alternative vision of Christianity, one based on healing and love. *Proverbs of Ashes* is both a condemnation of bad theology and a passionate search for what truly saves us.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
"Your maxims are proverbs of ashes!" Thus spoke Job when his friends spouted pious platitudes in the face of his considerable suffering. Brock, a Harvard theologian, and Parker, a seminary president, echo Job's cry in this deep theological study of suffering and its role in the Christian faith. The two women became friends in graduate school and continued to meet after graduation, discussing their personal lives and how their experiences shaped their theology. "We were convinced Christianity could not promise healing for victims of intimate violence as long as its central image was a divine parent who required the death of his child," writes Brock. The two authors take turns communicating their views, sharing deep and painful traumas (such as Parker's childhood sexual abuse, estranged marriage and abortion) as they weigh the concept of "redemptive suffering." Too many Christian women, they argue, have remained in abusive situations because they have been taught that their suffering is necessary for spiritual growth. The authors are serious theologians, confidently challenging such explicators of the faith as Anselm and Abelard, Wesley and Whitehead. Readers may not agree with Brock and Parker that the fundamental Christian doctrine of Jesus' atonement is inherently dangerous and destructive for Christians, especially women. But they cannot help but be swayed by the book's searing passion and profoundly literary writing style (a remarkable achievement in a coauthored work). Brock and Parker have thrown down a gauntlet that cannot be ignored.

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From Library Journal
Brock (director, Fellowship Program, Radcliffe Inst., Harvard Univ.) and Parker (president, Starr King Sch. for the Ministry, Graduate Theological Union) have written an intensely personal and provocative book. They aim to show that the theological assertion that God required the death of Jesus to save the world sanctions violence. This is not a theological text but more of a dual memoir in which the authors alternately tell the stories of their lives, emphasizing the violence that they have encountered. Basing theology on their own experiences is not a problem, but on balance, the narratives swamp the theological arguments presented here. The most telling indictment of the harmful effects of traditional Christian views comes from their stories of women who have stayed in abusive relationships because they felt that the church taught them to accept suffering passively, if not gratefully. A first step in an interesting but unfinished theological project, this is recommended for larger public libraries and academic libraries with religious studies and women's studies collections. Stephen Joseph, Butler Cty. Community Coll., PA
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From Booklist
With breathtaking self-disclosure, Brock and Parker confront one of Christianity's most influential concepts, redemptive suffering, which, they argue, has proven particularly destructive for women, who under its influence often have been socialized to be self-sacrificial and to tolerate abuse. Drawing on their personal experiences of abuse and those reported by friends and counselors of victims, they reject the claim that suffering, including the suffering of Jesus on the Cross, "saves" us. Instead, they insist, we are saved by diverse supportive communities of loving persons, in whose presence we experience God. The three sections of their book correspond to Lent, Pentecost, and Epiphany; this organization carries the text from suffering to presence, thereby presenting the argument in the order of the liturgical year. Within that continuum, which sustains theological reflection, Brock and Parker also tell the book's many particular stories beautifully.

Furthermore, they report that their friendship made the book possible. Indeed, that friendship breathes in its pages as it pronounces good news for readers of all faiths who are seeking resources for resisting violence.
Steven Schroeder
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Users Review

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Ronald Castaneda:

The event that you get from Proverbs of Ashes : Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us is the more deep you searching the information that hide within the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to be aware of but Proverbs of Ashes : Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us giving you thrill feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood simply by anyone who read this because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having that Proverbs of Ashes : Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us instantly.

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