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## Male Headship and Patriarchal Theologies

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When I was about 6 years old I remember playing by the closed kitchen door hearing my aunt tell her sister (my mother) that her husband hit her. I knew I wasn't supposed to hear and so I kept it to myself. But it registered with me as a bad, bad thing. I never trusted ? or liked ? that uncle after that.

The connection between abuse and male headship is obvious but there are plenty of people who will argue that there is no direct link. Since each case of domestic abuse must be judged on its own, it is easy for the supporters of patriarchal theologies to insist that the vast majority of those who hold to male headship do not abuse their wives and so it's not the theology that is wrong but the individual man. But this is like saying that not all slave owners were cruel and so it wasn't slavery that was wrong but particular slaver owners. Within the Anglican Church it has been challenged in various ways but it persists amongst Conservative Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics. Just as disturbingly, it can also persist as unrecognised gender bias amongst those who might well believe themselves to be liberal or progressive.

Male headship has no more place in the Church than slavery and the arguments for and against are precisely those for and against slavery. As our society slips further into alt-right ideologies, we see these ideas emerging within the Church and unless they are named for what they are, they will shape the Church in 21st century and the Gospel imperative to liberate women (and expand all other forms of inclusion) will be eroded, if not lost.

Domestic abuse is too often physical violence and sexual abuse, but it can just as often be psychological abuse, emotional abuse (both of which many victims say they found harder to bear than physical abuse).

There is also financial abuse as well as drug, substance and alcohol abuse, all of which are recognised as such in law. It is too easy for those maintaining a male headship theology to claim that the New Testament supports a male dominated household because it looks like that to the outsider. But to the insider the Christian household of the the first 3 centuries was a radical departure from male dominated Roman society. The first Christian communities differed from Roman society in that they were open to all sorts of people, to the old and the young, to men and women. Authority within them did not, by any means, always reflect male dominance, though sometimes it might. In the gathered community of the Church the slaves and the centurion, the woman and the man, the child and senator, were all equal before God ? and each other.

This was not a perfect picture andm just as the experiment in communitarianism recorded in Acts did not last, so there were sufficient pressures on the young Church for it to easily fall back to male domination. However, the roots of Christianity are clearly in households in the which the relationships between men and women did not to reflect those of the Roman world but the new wine of the Kingdom of God. That it all went wrong is no reason to dismiss it as God?s will for God?s people, so those who argue for male headship are, in fact, arguing out of a failure of the Church, not the voice of the New Testament. **There is to be no place for domination of one over another in the Wise Communities of Jesus.**

All power and control is demonic and is always about abusive possession. The consequences are vile ? as human beings are squeezed and diminished, as women, children (and sometimes men too) begin to believe they are worth less, if not worthless. And even when there is no physical or sexual abuse there will be emotional abuse, psychological abuse and quite likely financial abuse. And all that is plain evil done in the name of the God of love.

There will be women who will defend male headship. And that is perhaps the most evil result of all.

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*Written by the Rev'd Canon Wyn Beynon, IC regional ambassador for Worcestershire, Priest-in-Charge of Wychbrooke Parishes, and General Synod member. This blog is adapted from a blog on Wyn's website here [1].*

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#### **Links**

[1] <https://www.wynbeynon.co.uk/male-headship-and-the-sin-of-patriarchy.php>