Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Mt. 22.36-40

Elaine could not speak for one week after entering the women’s shelter. She was reclusive and withdrawn. She showed bruises from being ‘whipped’ with a large stick. Elaine came to the shelter from a home of regular church attendance. Her husband served as an elder in the congregation. They had three children of school age.

Her history of domestic experience involved her husband’s claim of patriarchal authority in the home. He felt it was not only his right but also his duty to enforce his interpretation of ‘God’s order’ within his family. His practices included absolute authority in all value and behavioral issues, which were regulated through verbal demands followed by corporal punishment. He used a rod to implement his rule. His practices expressed what he felt was his theological mandate for responsibility. The church affirmed his theological rationale behind ruling in the home.

Several aspects had begun to cause reactions within the family struc-
ture. The teenage child had run away twice. Elaine had begun experiencing depression so severe that she retreated to the bed, claiming exhaustion. She said she often spent most of her time crying and did not have the energy to function.

Once Elaine had gone to her pastor, who admonished her that remaining with her husband under the situation was her Christian responsibility. He reiterated the approval of God’s will in her acceptance of her husband’s dominance.

Now Elaine had come to the shelter. She had made a decision to leave her husband and children and to travel to her family out of state. This was the only option which she felt was open to her. It was her attempt to regain control of her life. Otherwise, she felt she ‘could not go on’. Her deepest concerns were that to do this she felt she was defying God. In her theological belief system, this equated to apostasy by living in sin, choosing to act against the will of God. Elaine also struggled with leaving her children. Yet, she felt powerless to help them when she had no strength to help herself.

Her decision confronted her not only with rugged decisions concerning being a wife and mother, but also with a fundamental fear concerning her relationship with God. She could act only because it seemed her very survival was at stake. Her faith, like her life, became fragmented in trying to meet her primary need for safety. Physical and emotional survival were issues she had been willing to compromise in order to avoid rupture from her family. To leave home would present further trauma through separation and facing the unknown. She was left experiencing domestic fragmentation, compounded by her spirituality, which offered guilt and alienation.

Pentecost: Pneumatology of Empowerment and Mutuality

For too long theology has remained silent on the issue of domestic violence. This article will explore the void. Through examination of biblical themes as well as particular passages of Scripture, a theological response will emerge to address the problem of abuse. Direct implications between theological underpinnings and the demands that they exert upon relationships will be the primary concern of this paper. Its purpose is to develop and strengthen a deeper understanding of the sacredness inherent within human personhood as it is created for interrelatedness with God and others.