
Introduction to This Issue

Child Abuse and the Church: Prevention, Pastoral Care, and Healing

The Gospel writers make clear Jesus was deeply aware of the needs of children and was fully committed to protecting them from abuse and neglect. According to Matthew, Jesus is the descendent of three sexually exploited women (Matt 1:1–7),¹ and was nearly the victim of infanticide (Matt 2:1–21). Although God became flesh at a time when it was both common and lawful to neglect, beat, or sexually abuse children, the words of Jesus were counter-cultural to these practices.²

While other religious and secular leaders marginalized children, Jesus said that children were messengers from our creator and that our treatment of children spoke volumes about what we really thought of God (Mark 9:36–37). Jesus showed his love for children by praying for them (Matt 19:13–14), blessing them (Mark 10:13–16), healing them (Mark 9:27), and by taking them in his arms (Mark 9:36–37; 10:13–16).

In his teachings, Jesus spoke of children as an illustration of faith (Matt 18:1–4), made it clear they should be cared for (Matt 7:9–14), contended that even infants could be given divine wisdom (Matt 11:25), and scolded his disciples for keeping children away (Mark 10:13–16). Jesus said it would be better to be drowned in a sea with a millstone around our neck than to hurt a child (Matt 18:6)³ and promised to hold accountable those who preached in his name but failed to care for the suffering (Matt 7:23; 25:41–45).

Although the early church often distinguished itself through the care of children,⁴ the modern church has been beset with child sexual abuse scandals⁵ and by theological constructs that have contributed to the physical abuse of children,⁶ the withholding of even life-saving medical care,⁷ and that have excused us from reporting abuse or otherwise failing to care for the suffering.⁸ As one victim of child abuse asked, “How can Christians worship a God who was a victim of abuse while failing to care for the victims sitting in our pews?”⁹

There is little doubt that every Sunday, our pews are occupied by numerous survivors of child maltreatment. According to research from Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control, more than one out of four women and approximately one out of six men were sexually abused as children. More than one out of four adults suffered beatings during childhood. Thirteen percent witnessed domestic violence, eleven percent experienced emotional abuse, and ten percent were neglected.¹⁰

The failings of the modern church to consistently respond with excellence to the high level of child abuse and neglect in our congregations and communities may be rooted in our limited knowledge. In a 2015 study of the course catalogues of every

Church is about the life-giving relationships God is engendering wherever and whenever people meet. We allow church to happen by naming the presence of God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in fresh expressions, as tradition and innovation come to intersect.

accredited seminary in the United States, researchers found only 3 percent of seminaries had a focused course on child maltreatment.¹¹ It may also be that we have forgotten or ignored the clear, unequivocal command of Jesus to care for the least of these (Matt 25:40). Whatever the reason, the church needs to improve.

To assist the church in recognizing and responding to child abuse, this theme issue of *Currents* includes a number of articles by leading experts in the fields of child protection and theology. **Amy Russell** gives us an overview of research on the spiritual impact of maltreatment. **Alison Feigh** discusses the importance of child and adult education in preventing abuse. **Shira Berkovits** outlines ten essential policies all congregations should have. **Chris Anderson** addresses the impact of trauma on boys and men. **Pete Singer** offers guidance in coordinating pastoral care with mental health care, while **Victor Vieth** outlines the coordination of spiritual and medical care. In a separate article, Victor Vieth offers concrete suggestions for working with children who have committed a sexual offense while **Cory Jewell Jensen** offers counsel to faith leaders working with adult sex offenders. **Basyle Tchividjian** proposes a process for responding to an allegation of sexual abuse within a faith community. **Troy Troftgruben** debunks the theology that uses the Bible to justify acts of violence or other harm to child and adult survivors of abuse. **Craig L. Nesson** proposes a child liberation theology that would make the cause of children a central tenet of the Christian faith.

In *Listening to Immigrant Voices*, **Nouk Vagh** (with **Gregg Hel-land** and **Jua J. Her**) writes about the identity and history of the Hmong people, including their origin and culture. He explores the roles they played during the Vietnam War and why so many are

now in the United States. In the *Currents Focus* feature, **Kathryn M. Kvamme** explores the lives of adolescent girls, focusing on the unique struggles and challenges they face daily, including the loss of self and voice, the deleterious effects of social media, and violence. She then examines how a theology of the cross can speak into the lives of girls, showing them the presence of the crucified and risen Lord in the midst of their suffering. We are also pleased to offer readers the next serving of *Preaching Helps* prepared by a team of authors coordinated by **Barbara K. Lundblad**.

We pray these articles will spur the faith community to protect the innocent, to seek the lost, and to hold accountable those who hurt children. In the words of Martin Luther, “It is to the little children we must preach, it is for them that the entire ministry exists.”¹²

Victor Vieth, Guest Editor

Craig L. Nesson, Issue Co-Editor

Endnotes

1. For a discussion of the sexual assault of Tamar and the “power rape” of Bathsheba, see Richard M Davidson, “Sexual Abuse in the Old Testament,” in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzter (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 144–150.

2. See generally, O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: the Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

3. Some scholars believe this was a clear admonition against the sexual abuse of children. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 450; William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 121–123.

4. See generally, O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: the Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005); W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004); Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Power of Children*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014).

5. Michael D’Antonio, *Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime and the Era of Catholic Scandal* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013); Kathryn Joyce, “The Next Christian Sex Abuse Scandal,” *American Prospect*, May 4, 2014, accessed June 3, 2018, <http://prospect.org/article/next-christian-sex-abuse-scandal>.

6. See e.g., William J. Webb, *Corporal Punishment in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

7. Paul A. Offit, *Bad Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

8. John D Schuetze, “Pastoral Theology Brief: Matthew 18 also Includes Verse 6,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, no 112 (Summer 2015).

9. Victor I. Vieth, “When God Was a Victim: What a Child Abuse Survivor Taught me About Good Friday,” *Religion News Service*, April 2, 2015, accessed June 3, 2018, <http://religionnews.com/2015/04/02/god-victim-child-abuse-survivor-taught-good-friday/>.

10. Vincent J. Felitti & Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, eds. Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, and Clare Pain (Cambridge Medicine, 2010).

11. Janine Betz, “Analysis of Child Abuse Training at Accredited Seminaries,” unpublished research, Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center (2015).

12. Charles Daudert, ed., *Off the Record with Martin Luther: An Original Translation of the Table Talks* (Hansa-Hewlett Publishing Co., 2009), 233.

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Listening to Immigrant Voices

The Story of the Hmong

Nouk Vagh

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With

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Jua J. Her, *Hmong Central Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn.*

The author, Nouk Vagh, is a Hmong, who considers it an honor to contribute this article to the “Listening to Immigrant Voices” feature in Currents in Theology and Mission. This article is about a group of refugees who started coming to this country in 1976. The last wave of those coming from Southeast Asia, called “Hmong,” ended in 2005.

Who are the Hmong?

The Hmong are members of an ethnic group that had been living in China for thousands of years before they fled to Southeast Asia beginning in the eighteenth century. Although they do not have a country of their own, they have developed their own tradition and culture within their small mountainous farming communities.

Hmong people today are scattered to many parts of the world. According to the 2010 census in the New World Encyclopedia, there are over 3 million in China, 800,000 in Vietnam, 550,000 in Laos, 260,000 in the U.S., 150,000 in Thailand, 15,000 in France, 12,000 in Myanmar (Burma), 2,000 in French Guiana, 2,000 in Australia, 850 in Canada, 600 in Argentina, and several families in both Germany and Japan.

Hmong history

It is difficult to trace the early history of the Hmong people because there were no written records. The Hmong history, verbally passed down from generation to generation, said that the Hmong originated from around the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers in China thousands of years ago. However, in the eighteenth century, tensions arose between Imperial China and the Hmong because of Imperial China's quest to unite smaller kingdoms and ethnic minorities as one nation. Since then our ancestors have never gotten along with the Imperial Chinese, because they invaded our lands and killed our people. This suppression went on for decades. The majority of Hmong chose to remain in China, but several hundred of them, along with their leaders, decided to move south to Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar in the 1700s to escape the persecution.

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Before the war

Before the secret war in Laos, the Hmong lived in harmony. The responsibilities of the men were farming and making sure families were well fed throughout the year. The Hmong lived in peace. They were born, raised, advanced in age, and passed away in the same villages, because there was no war and therefore no need to flee from place to place.

The Hmong's roles in the secret war

After 1960, the lives of the Hmong changed because the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sought out and recruited Hmong people to fight the so called “secret war” against the North Vietnamese and the Communist Pathet Lao. The Hmong were known to be skillful and loyal fighters alongside the French against the Japanese prior to the secret war. The Hmong played many critical roles under the direction of General Vangpao and the U.S. CIA, first by disrupting the North Vietnamese from sending troops and supplies into South Vietnam using the Ho Chi Minh Trail; second, by rescuing downed American pilots; and, third, by defending and protecting the important radar site, known to the CIA as “Lima Site 85” at Phu Pha Thi, which directed American pilots from South Vietnam to bomb North Vietnamese military installations.

Our men began to disappear: young males were recruited to fight the war, and most of them returned to their families from the frontlines in body bags. More and more, boys became involved; the

average age of Hmong recruits was fourteen. Even more Hmong males were killed protecting freedom, including my three uncles. Many families were left without any male over the age of fourteen in the household.

After the war

In 1975, after the U.S. pulled out of South Vietnam and the Communist Pathet Lao overthrew the Laotian Monarchy, General Vangpao, his family, hundreds of Hmong military leaders, and their families had to be evacuated by plane immediately to Thailand for fear of reprisal. Thousands of Hmong who were left behind followed suit and decided to risk their lives by walking days and nights through thick jungle before reaching the Thai border.

However, many Hmong were unable to reach the Thai border because they drowned while crossing the Mekong River. The Communist Laos stopped many groups from fleeing the country by ambush and mining their paths, and then taking the captives back for more punishment. There were several refugee camps set up in North Eastern Thailand to temporarily settle the Hmong before they sought asylum in many European and Western countries, including Australia, French Guiana, Canada, Germany, and the United States.

As a result of siding with the U.S., the Hmong who were left behind became singled out by the victorious Communist government of Laos and Vietnam. Thus many Hmong leaders began to disappear mysteriously without any trace, and many were shot dead during the night without any reason. People began to panic and be frightened because no one knew who was going to be next. Therefore, thousands of Hmong fled deep into the mountainous jungle of Laos to fend for themselves.

My family and I were among the many thousands of Hmong people who spent several years hiding in the jungle and continuing to fight against the oppressors for survival. We tried to survive against all odds because we were being hunted like animals. We kept ourselves alive by eating roots, leaves, bamboo shoots, wild potatoes, and all kinds of wild animals. We lived in makeshift tents under thick tree canopies and were always on the run. Many people were either killed by the enemies or died from starvation, diseases, and chemical warfare, especially the small children and weak elders. We were unable to set up fire or cook during the day, because the smoke would give away our hiding place to the enemies for shelling and bombing. For this reason, all cooking was done at night to make sure we had enough food to last for the whole day.

In the latter part of 1978, my dad decided that enough was enough; he took our family along with about 300 others and we walked through thick jungle for three days before reaching the Mekong River. We cut lots of bamboo in about two foot lengths and tied two pieces together as a floating device for adults. We made bamboo rafts, so children and older people could ride them across. The Mekong River is extremely difficult to cross by swimming without the floating supports.

My family and I settled in Ban Vinai Camps in the Province of Leoi, Thailand, for about three years prior to coming to the

In 1976, many Hmong people began arriving in the U.S. after being sponsored as refugees, and many were sponsored by the Lutheran denomination. The majority of Hmong people in this country are in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

U.S. On July 21, 1981, my family and I landed in San Francisco International Airport and were headed the next day to our final destination in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In June 1985, we moved from Pittsburgh to St. Paul, Minnesota, and have been living here ever since.

In 1976, many Hmong people began arriving in the U.S. after being sponsored as refugees, and many were sponsored by the Lutheran denomination. The majority of Hmong people in this country are in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, with many others scattered across the states. According to the 2010 census, there were more than 260,000 Hmong in the United States. More than 66,000 have made Minnesota their home, most of whom live in or near the Twin Cities, which has the largest urban Hmong population in America. Approximately 50 percent of us identify ourselves as Christians (according to the Historical Society of Minnesota). Moreover, I have noticed that English has become the first spoken language, and Hmong has become the second spoken language for most Hmong under the age of thirty-five.

Many Hmong today in the U.S. still embrace our culture. Our society is divided into eighteen main clans; each main clan consists of many sub-clans. Traditionally, our daily life or social activities are centered on these clans. The clan leaders make decisions for their clans and keep peace among the members. Each family belongs to a sub-clan and a sub-clan belongs to the main clan. For example, I am a Vagh (Vang), so I belong to a sub-clan of the main Vang clan, which consists of twenty-four other sub-clans. Accordingly, an elected leader, in order to oversee the main clan, has to be elected depending on the established policy and similarly for any other clan. When a woman marries, she joins her husband's clan. Clan members' responsibilities include support of each other, and thus we are drawn nearer to each other in the same clan.

Today only a few Hmong Christian families still believe in the old clan. This belief is no longer true for most of us who have become Christians because Christ enables us to break this barrier. We are no longer encouraged to live closer to our blood relatives, rather closer instead to our new brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ sets us free and we are freed to live wherever we wish as long as there is a church for us to worship our Lord, Jesus Christ, regardless of clan, race, and ethnicity.

Child Liberation Theology

Craig L. Nesson

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A child is born into the world entirely dependent upon others for care. An infant searches with the eyes to seek and attend to faces of those who will care and respond. A child's healthy development hinges on the capacity to place basic trust in trustworthy caretakers. A child received into a trustworthy, caring environment receives the emotional and spiritual conditions necessary for wholesome psychological development throughout the remainder of life.

Children are oriented toward trusting not only parents or guardians but also have the capacity to develop faith in God. Children listen to songs and stories about God's loving kindness with an intuition to trust God's own care and accompaniment throughout life. A child's capacity to develop faith in God through the work of the Holy Spirit belongs to the spiritual nature of human beings. Just as a child needs basic trust from caregivers in order to thrive, the child is blessed by having spiritual trust in God as the One who provides the ultimate foundation for the trustworthiness of being at home in the world.¹

When caregivers prove incapable or negligent in fulfilling the needs of the child, healthy development is interrupted. Depending on the nature of that failure, there may be long-term, even irreversible, consequences that negatively affect well-being for life.² The untrustworthiness of the primary nurturers also can carry over to undermine ability to trust in God, stunting spiritual development as well.³

When children are harmed, they respond to the trauma through the full range of emotional expressions belonging to the human. These emotions, however, may be suppressed by their caregivers, who may react to the child with intimidating and harmful emotions, words, and touch, including corporal punishment or

A child received into a trustworthy, caring environment receives the emotional and spiritual conditions necessary for wholesome psychological development throughout the remainder of life.

physical abuse.

One form of expression that transcends the capacity of young children is their inability to put their experiences into writing. At least in part, this may help to account for the relative absence of literature exploring a child liberation theology. Two of the earliest references to "child liberation theology" are from authors who write from the perspective of those responding to the reality of the abuse of children.

Janet Pais in her path-breaking book, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse*, devotes a foundational chapter to the shape of child liberation theology:

The case of children as an oppressed group is unique. Children do not have the education or the resources necessary to speak for themselves or, having spoken, to effect any change. In fact, their plight is worse than a lack of education or resources. An outstanding feature of their oppression is that their feelings and perceptions of reality are often denied; abused children are often denied the ability to know what is happening to them or that it could possibly be any other way.⁴

Pais describes the innate powerlessness of the child and the limited range of "actions" available to children who suffer abuse: "conforming to adult wishes, running away, dropping out, suicide, substance abuse, behavior problems, and mental illness, tend not to liberate children, but rather to make their oppression worse."⁵

1. See generally, Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2. Vincent J. Felitti & Robert F. Anda, "The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare," in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, eds. Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, & Clare Pain (Cambridge Medicine, 2010).

3. Donald F. Walker, et al., "Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents," *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice* 41 (2010).

4. Janet Pais, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1971), 16.

5. Pais, 17.

With reference to Pais, Ryan Stollar argues that the bracketing out of children's suffering is a consequence of "adultism": "the viewing of theological concepts from the vantage point of adults rather than the vantage point of children."⁶ He poses a series of critical questions about the failure of liberation theologies to assume the perspective of children by articulating their concerns:

In the same way that faith communities ought to fight against classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in these other spheres, how can faith communities work together to dismantle systematic prejudice and discrimination against children not only within, but also without, the church?

How has adultism pervaded our other, non-faith communities, including our ethical, social, political, and philosophical spheres?

How have our theological concepts been grounded in a *child/adult binary* — namely, that childhood and adulthood are two separate stages, the former of which involves being less than fully human and the latter of which implies full humanity?

How do we elevate the voices of children themselves? And how do we learn to — and encourage others to — engage those voices as more than simply 'childish' beliefs or thoughts?⁷

These two authors contrast the situation of abused children to the suffering of other oppressed groups, who have articulated particular forms of liberation theology: "Children are inherently disadvantaged. They form the one group whose liberation can never change this. As long as a child is a child, she or he will never have access to power or resources equal to adults."⁸

The method of liberation theologies consists of five elements: 1) identification with particular forms of oppression and suffering, 2) prophetic critique of that condition, 3) social analysis of the causes of oppression and suffering, 4) biblical and theological engagement to address that suffering and overcome that oppression, and 5) advocacy of structural change toward a greater approximation of justice. While major forms of liberation theology have been developed from many particular vantage points of oppression and suffering—Latin American liberation theology, black liberation theologies, feminist theologies, womanist theologies, Latina/o and *mujerista* theologies, Native American liberation theologies, LGBTQ+ liberation theologies, and ecojustice theologies—the distinctive perspective of children has been notably underrepresented.

Child liberation theology deserves its own rightful place as a

Children are inherently disadvantaged. They form the one group whose liberation can never change this. As long as a child is a child, she or he will never have access to power or resources equal to adults.

central, if not primary, vantage point for engaging in the method of liberation theology. The suffering and oppression of children cries out for advocacy, insofar as the experiences of childhood mark and mar their very identity and being for the remainder of life. As the church, operating as the body of Christ, seeks to address the root causes of social disease and disorder, its praxis will focus intentionally on those issues that affect the lives of children as an urgent priority.

Here we focus on four themes that address central concerns holding children in bondage. Each has extensive consequences for their well-being not only in childhood but throughout their entire lives: freedom from material deprivation, freedom from neglect, freedom from corporal punishment and physical abuse, and freedom from sexual abuse.

Freedom from material deprivation

Children remain the most vulnerable victims of endemic poverty globally and domestically. Among the factors that affect children directly are malnutrition, unavailability of clean water, inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene, lack of medical care, disease (especially childhood diseases preventable through immunization), infant mortality, and environmental degradation. The disparity of wealth across the globe results in a concatenation of economic forces that has established infrastructure that serves economic elites at the expense of sufficiency for children and their families, especially women.

Other forms of liberation theology, especially those originating in Latin America, have analyzed the devastating effects of poverty.⁹ Here we focus only on central impacts upon children.

Bread for the World statistics are compelling:

Every year, 2.6 million children die as a result of hunger-related causes. In the U.S., nearly 16 million children — one in five — live in households that struggle to put food on the table. Even short-term episodes of hunger can cause lasting damage to a child's development. Hunger puts children at risk of a range of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical problems.¹⁰

6. Ryan Stollar, "Towards a Child Liberation Theology," <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unfundamentalistparenting/2016/04/towards-a-child-liberation-theology/> Accessed 26 December 2017.

7. Stollar, "Towards a Child Liberation Theology."

8. Pais, 17.

9. Cf. Craig L. Nessan, *The Vitality of Liberation Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012), Chapter One, 1–13.

10. This and the following quote from Bread for the World, "Who Experiences Hunger," <http://www.bread.org/who-experiences-hunger> Accessed 28 December 2017.

Because children are entirely dependent upon adults for their well-being, they suffer high risks from hunger. Moreover, their rapidly growing bodies are exceptionally vulnerable to all the lasting effects caused by hunger.

Roger Thurow documents how the first 1,000 days of life are crucial for child development through case studies from four diverse settings across the world: Uganda, India, Guatemala, and the United States (Chicago). The failure to provide adequate nutrition for children, and therefore also for their mothers during pregnancy, results in one of every five children in the world suffering from stunting, about 170 million children in total.

A child who is severely stunted is sentenced to a life of underachievement: diminished performance in school, lower productivity and wages in the workplace, more health problems throughout life, and a greater propensity for chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease as an adult. And that life sentence is most often rendered by the time a child is two. For stunting is largely the result of a debilitating mix of poor nutrition, unclean environment, and lack of caregiver stimulation during the 1,000 days.¹¹

While the diagnosis for treating the problem of child development in the first 1,000 days from pregnancy to the second birthday might appear to be obvious, the on-the-ground challenges in equipping women to be able to act on best practices in prenatal and early childhood care are enormous. In the settings Thurow examines, he finds that even in those contexts where concerted efforts have been made to educate about nutritious diet (including vitamin supplements), immunizations, hygiene, sanitation, and child development, the obstacles to implementation are formidable.

The availability and especially the cost of purchasing fruits, vegetables, sources of protein, and vitamin supplements to provide the micronutrients necessary for healthy development are beyond the means of poor people. The accessibility to, adequacy of, and cost of pre-natal care, including what is needed for home hygiene and sanitation measures, make recommended practices unavailable to poor people. These realities, coupled with the actual birthing conditions for many poor mothers, make the first day “the most perilous day of life.” Each year, 1 million babies die within 24 hours of their birth.¹²

The living conditions of poor people also increases the risks to children in their first two years. Gender discrimination against girls in many societies places them at greater risk for stunting and infant mortality. While breast feeding provides the best possible nutrients to babies, incentives from corporations to substitute expensive formula (often promoted through birthing hospitals) and the demands of daily life dissuade many mothers from following the best instruction. The World Bank finds that, “child mortality

The great limiting factor is the economic capacity of poor people to provide what is necessary for basic nutrition and medical care during those crucial [first] 1,000 days. Child liberation theology, like other forms of liberation theology, therefore must advocate for the structural changes needed for a threshold of economic justice across the world.

is about fifteen times greater in lower-income countries than in rich-world countries, and maternal mortality is nearly thirty times higher. Almost all of those deaths are preventable.”¹³

Thurow draws this stunning conclusion:

If we want to shape the future, to truly improve the world, we have 1,000 days to do it, mother by mother, child by child. For what happens in those 1,000 days through pregnancy to the second birthday determines to a large extent the course of a child’s life—his or her ability to grow, learn, work, succeed—and, by extension, the long-term health, stability, and prosperity of the society in which that child lives.¹⁴

However, the great limiting factor is the economic capacity of poor people to provide what is necessary for basic nutrition and medical care during those crucial 1,000 days. Child liberation theology, like other forms of liberation theology, therefore must advocate for the structural changes needed for a threshold of economic justice across the world.

Freedom from neglect

In this context we formally distinguish child neglect from physical or sexual child abuse:

Child neglect is defined as a type of maltreatment related to the failure to provide needed, age-appropriate care. Unlike physical and sexual abuse, neglect is usually typified by an ongoing pattern of inadequate care and is readily observed by individuals in close contact with the child. Once children are in school, personnel often notice indicators of child neglect such as poor hygiene, poor weight gain, inadequate medical care,

11. Roger Thurow, *The First 1,000 Days: A Crucial Time for Mothers and Children—And the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 2.

12. Thurow, *The First 1,000 Days*, 125.

13. Thurow, *The First 1,000 Days*, 102.

14. Thurow, *The First 1,000 Days*, 7.

or frequent absences from school. Professionals have defined four types of neglect: physical, emotional, educational, and medical.¹⁵

Neglect is characterized not only by overtly harmful acts but also by the omission of needful care. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention includes the following types of maltreatment in its definition: physical neglect, emotional neglect, medical and dental neglect, educational neglect, inadequate supervision, and exposure to violent environments.¹⁶

The causes of child neglect are manifold. Although most poor families provide devoted attention to the care of their children in spite of economic hardship, parents who suffer from economic scarcity may give priority to the procurement of food and other things needed for physical survival at the expense of caring adequately for children.

Other causes of neglect can be related to the incapacity of parents and caregivers to maintain a level of care for their own lives. The disorder in their own existence leaves dependent children in precarious circumstances. Studies indicate, for example, that children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are far more likely (three times or more) to neglect their children than those who do not abuse substances. Likewise, those parents or caregivers who suffer from certain forms of untreated mental illness are less likely to be able to give adequate care to their children.

Another prevailing problem contributing to child neglect is the inadequate preparation of parents for the tasks of caring for and raising children. The default position for many parents is what they learned about child raising from their own parents, who may or may not themselves have been skilled in parenting. Where deficient and neglectful parenting is passed on from generation to generation, an intervention may be necessary to interrupt the cycle. Providing intentional training for new parents and ongoing skill development for parenting deserve attention by institutions with access to children and their parents, including by faith organizations.

Freedom from corporal punishment and physical abuse

Contrary to the massive research and evidence that demonstrates the harmful and lasting physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences of corporal punishment, parents and caregivers continue to use physical punishment at alarming rates. Increasingly in countries across the world statutes are being put in place to criminalize corporal punishment.¹⁷ The exercise of corporal punishment has

15. "Child Neglect," *Psychology Today* online, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/child-neglect> Accessed 28 December 2017.

16. For this and the following statistics, see Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Major Findings" (2016), <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/definitions.html> Accessed 1 January 2018.

17. Victor Vieth, "Providing Pastoral Guidance to Parents on the Corporal Punishment of Children," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44 (Jan 2017): 31.

Providing intentional training for new parents and ongoing skill development for parenting deserve attention by institutions with access to children and their parents, including by faith organizations.

been assumed by many adults as a normal means of child discipline. Without regard for the harmful effects, spanking and other forms of physical punishment have been passed down from one generation to the next.

The medical risks of corporal punishment include the tendency to excess: "in the U.S., 28% of children are hit so hard that they receive injuries."¹⁸ Research indicates the "parents who are out of control emotionally, or who are using objects, are at greater risk to engage in abusive behaviors including kicking, beating, burning, shaking, or hitting a child in places other than the buttocks."¹⁹ It is not only the risk of injury that should dissuade parents and caregivers from corporal punishment but also other long term health risks. "Even in the absence of more severe child maltreatment, researchers have found that harsh physical discipline (pushing, shoving, grabbing, slapping, and hitting) is associated with higher risks of cardiovascular disease, arthritis, obesity, history of family disfunction, and mental disorders."²⁰ Vieth states: "This is one reason the American Academy of Pediatrics discourages parents from venturing down the path of hitting children as a means of discipline."²¹

The mental health and behavioral risks are also substantial. Research shows that there is "no evidence that spanking is associated with improved child behavior and rather found spanking to be associated with increased risk of 13 documented outcomes."²² While this should not be interpreted to mean that corporal punishment is determinative of negative outcomes, the research does demonstrate that corporal punishment is "a risk factor and notes that the more a child is hit and the harsher the discipline, the greater the risk factors for poorer mental health, including

18. Vieth, 32.

19. Vieth, 32, who quotes Adam J. Zolotov et al., "Speak Softly—and Forget the Stick: Corporal Punishment and Child Abuse," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 35 (2008): 364–365.

20. Vieth, 32, who cites Tracie O. Affi, et al., "Harsh Physical Punishment in Childhood and Adult Physical Health," *Pediatrics* 132 (2013): e333–338.

21. Vieth, 32, who cites Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, "Guidance for Effective Discipline," *Pediatrics* 723 (1998): 101.

22. Vieth, 33, who cites Elizabeth T. Gershoff and Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, "Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Family Psychology* 30.4 (2016): 453–469.

depression, anxiety, anger management, and inability to sustain healthy relationships.”²³

The spiritual risks of corporal punishment also need to be taken seriously. When religion is used to justify child abuse or religious communities ignore the signs of child maltreatment, children are left with unsettling spiritual questions; thirty-four major studies, involving more than 19,000 abused children, demonstrate that large numbers of children “are spiritually damaged from maltreatment.”²⁴

It is not only that lack of education contributes to the ongoing use of corporal punishment by parents and caregivers, but influential Christian literature and many Christian churches continue to advocate for corporal punishment as necessary for child rearing, perpetuating the cycles leading to child abuse. Many of these sources cite biblical passages, especially from Proverbs, to justify their arguments. Vieth holds that both the research about the relation of corporal punishment to child abuse and the concomitant interpretation of Scripture warrant the opposite conclusion:

Whether holding extreme or moderate views on corporal punishment, Protestant proponents of the practice contend, or at least suggest, there is a biblical basis for their beliefs. Many respected biblical authorities beg to differ. According to these scholars the Bible does not require parents to discipline their children by hitting them. Some of these scholars argue that the Bible actually discourages corporal punishment; a handful of them even make the argument the Bible does not authorize the physical discipline of children.²⁵

It is imperative that religious leaders, pastors, and churches educate members and the public that the Bible does not warrant corporal punishment²⁶ and that contemporary research convincingly demonstrates the harmful physical, mental health, behavioral, and spiritual damage done by corporal punishment. Moreover, a consistent ethic of nonviolence by Christians would clearly insist on refraining from all forms of corporal punishment. A child liberation theology advocates an end to every form of corporal punishment and physical abuse against children.

Freedom from sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is the silent destroyer of the sacred lives of individuals and families in our society. “[T]he ACE [Adverse Childhood Experiences] study estimated that approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of eighteen.”²⁷ These statistics indicate the massive number of

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lives affected by child sexual abuse. As noted by Tchividjian and Berkovits, these “staggering estimates underscore the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse and make it likely that every reader of this [article] knows someone who has been, or is currently, the victim of sexual abuse.”²⁸

How is the extent of this scourge possible? Perpetrators intentionally act under a veil of secrecy to hide their grooming and exploitation by imposing secrecy through intimidation and threats against their victims, who as children are limited in their ability to disclose what has happened to them. The prevailing sense of societal shame that accompanies child sexual abuse also condemns many victims to silence about what they have suffered. The unwillingness of others to believe the accounts of victims about their sexual abuse further prolongs and magnifies the suffering.

Denial of abuse is one of the primary impediments toward its prevention. Child sexual abuse is not a new phenomenon; it cuts across socioeconomic status, geographic location, race, and religion.²⁹

Sexual abuse includes both contact behavior (all forms of inappropriate and exploitative touching) and non-contact behavior (for example, spoken or written sexual communication, voyeurism, viewing pornography, exhibitionism, or exposing a child’s naked body). Various terms are used to describe these dynamics, including child molestation, rape, and abuse.³⁰

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s social statement, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, affirms:

Safety within and outside the family is of overriding importance because the damage done to children and youth through sexual abuse or molestation can be remarkably deep and lasting. Such harmful behavior may include

23. Ibid.

24. Vieth, 33, who cites Donald F. Walker et al., “Changes in Personal Religion/Spirituality During and After Childhood Abuse: A Review and Synthesis,” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy* 1 (2009): 130.

25. Vieth, 29.

26. William J. Webb, *Corporal Punishment in the Bible: A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

27. Basyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits, *The Child*

Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017), 11, who cite the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Major Findings” (2016), <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html> Accessed 1 January 2018.

28. Tchividjian and Berkovits, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide*, 11.

29. Ibid.

30. See Tchividjian and Berkovits, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide*, 10-11.

inappropriate touching, exposure to pornography, exposing genitals to children or inducing children to do the same, and sexual or genital relations involving minors.³¹

Sexual abuse affects children not only through such acts but also through the extensive influence of commercial sexual exploitation:

Matters of concern to both society and the church extend beyond abuse and molestation to organized sexual exploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation is widespread throughout the United States and around the world...Expanding cyberspace and other electronic media create new challenges to the protection of children and youth. It is important that parents, society, and lawmakers continue to be extremely vigilant to protect the well-being of children and youth in this electronic world with its often-hidden dangers.³²

Because churches are greatly affected by the prevalence of child sexual abuse, both by what occurs in the lives of their members and through activities organized by congregations, new vigilance is urgently needed through education and comprehensive child protection policies. This should be reduced to writing and incorporated into church mission statements.³³ Excellent and practical resources for introducing, developing, and implementing child protection policies have been developed by the organization, Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE), which has published for congregational use *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries*.

This resource is comprehensive in providing: educational foundations (defining abuse, indicators, impact, and description of people who sexually abuse children), descriptions of protective practices (screening, safe behaviors, and routine protective measures), needful responses to violations of child abuse policy (limited access agreements, reporting, and independent reviews), guidance on how to support survivors, and instruction for implementing child protection policy (training, dissemination, evaluating, and updating).

The manual is filled with step-by-step worksheets to guide

31. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Social Statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, "Protecting Children and Youth in and for Trusting Relationships," http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.5159411.1518453362.1514741617-1346528254.1447786722 Accessed 1 January 2018.

32. Ibid.

33. For example, the ELCA has adopted this language: "This church calls for the adoption of preventive measures, including educational programs, appropriate policies, and screening of individuals who care for, supervise, or work with children within this church. It expects that all church leaders will report all instances of suspected child abuse." Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Social Statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, "Protecting Children and Youth in and for Trusting Relationships," http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.5159411.1518453362.1514741617-1346528254.1447786722 Accessed 1 January 2018.

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congregations in developing comprehensive and effective child protection policies. GRACE also offers Child Safeguarding Certification to accompany congregations through every stage in the process. Given the prevalence of child sexual abuse in our society and the susceptibility of churches in providing access to vulnerable children, we need to transform the climate of secrecy by creating new standards of expectation through the development of child protection policies and their implementation throughout the church.

Biblical and theological resources

The central conviction of a child liberation theology is that "God is Child."³⁴ The seminal work of Janet Pais stands at the creative origin of this under-referenced movement, which construes liberation theology from the experience of suffering children. Just as other liberation theologians affirm the normativity of specific forms of suffering as definitive for the character of God, child liberation theology centers attention on the revelation of God incarnate in the person of the Child Jesus:

Christian faith is centered on the belief that God became human flesh in the person of the Christ child. Jesus is the Word made flesh, God the Son (or Child) incarnate. Jesus tells us that when we receive a child in his name we receive him, and not him, but the one who sent him. In other words, when we receive a child in Christ's name, we receive Christ. We receive God's creative Word in the flesh, we receive God the Child incarnate.³⁵

Jesus rebuked the disciples for not allowing the children to come to him: "But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs'" (Mark 10:14). Moreover, Jesus extended radical welcome to children, breaking the moral standards of his time as well as ours, by relating to them as those with full personhood: "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never

34. Pais, 14–16.

35. Pais, 23.

enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:15–16).

Jesus, who was a child and experienced all the vicissitudes of childhood, makes the child a sacrament of the kingdom of God. Only by honoring, respecting, and becoming children can we ourselves know what it is to participate in kingdom existence. “If we are to take seriously Jesus’ words and receive each child in his name as Christ, then we must not have any attitude toward any child that would cause us to relate to that child differently from the way we would relate to the Christ child. We all share responsibility for the fate of all children.”³⁶ Jesus not only welcomes children but he makes the status of the child normative for all those who would access God’s kingdom.

God as Child becomes the hermeneutical key for reimagining the entirety of theology from the perspective not only of the suffering of children but what is good for children. This necessitates taking the point of view of the child as person rather than thinking about children as those who are either lacking or deficient of full humanity. The attitudes of Mary and Joseph in relationship to the child, Jesus, become normative for the relationship between parents and children. This means relating to a child as one would relate to the Christ Child: “divine in origin and perfect in human nature.”³⁷

Building upon the foundational work of Pais, Ryan Stollar has contributed a series of articles expanding on key theological themes, including recapitulation: how Jesus entered fully into the human condition to experience every aspect of what it means to be a vulnerable child: “it was necessary that he should pass through every age of life, from infancy to mature years.”³⁸ Jesus was a “powerless, fully human god-child born into a violently anti-child world...God becoming a marginalized, fully human child who is also fully God.”³⁹ Stollar, like Pais, writes as one focused on child protection, especially freedom from every form of physical and sexual abuse.

Taking “God is Child” as the point of departure for theological reflection entails radical revision of traditional interpretations of Scripture and doctrine that denigrate the status of the child as fully representative of the image of God. Conventional teaching about original sin, the Fourth Commandment, and parenting are among those teachings in need of serious reconstruction.

The fall into original sin is not about the inherent sinfulness of children based on the transmission of sin through the sexual process of conception, but rather original sin involves the harmful treatment of children passed on from one generation to the next through the transmission of shame, repression, and injury caused by parents and caretakers, who themselves were likely recipients of the same treatment as children.

The Fourth Commandment that instructs children to “Honor

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your father and mother” needs to be predicated on the moral imperative that parents are to honor their child in the same way they would honor the Child Jesus (Mark 9:36–37). In his explanation to the Fourth Commandment, Martin Luther contended that parents are obligated to care for and protect the children entrusted to them.⁴⁰

The lasting harm and damage done to children through Christian advocacy of corporal punishment, which fundamentally contradicts what God has revealed about children in Jesus Christ, must be unequivocally rejected. Although there are myriad scriptural references to the corporal punishment of adults (Prov 10:13; 18:6; 20:30; 26:3), the Christian community no longer advocates blows for men or women. In a similar vein, Christians need to interpret verses pertaining to the hitting of children (Prov 13:24) in the light of Jesus’ strong admonition not to hurt children (Mark 9:42). Since we now know that corporal punishment hurts children, this form of violence must be recognized as a sinful practice that Christ urges us to stop.

For Janet Pais, a key move toward reconstructing theology as child liberation theology involves making the relationship between Jesus and his Father normative for how we consider the proper relationship between fathers and children. Unlike those feminist perspectives that would distance themselves from using the Father metaphor to describe the character of God, based on negative experiences by children of their own fathers, Pais proposes reclaiming the Father-Child relationship between the Father and the Son in Christian theology as paradigmatic for how fathers are to relate to their children.

The use of “Father” in the gospel is not meant to give divine approval to power-based adult-child relationships, to fathers playing god, or to adult contempt for the child, nor does it define God or imply divine masculinity. Rather the “Father” symbol of the gospel responds to and transforms broken human fatherhood, the prototype of all power-based relationships and therefore the aspect

36. Pais, 24.

37. See Pais, 25.

38. Ryan Stollar, “Jesus as Child,” citing Irenaeus, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/unfundamentalistparenting/2017/06/jesus-as-child/> Accessed 28 December 2017.

39. Stollar, “Jesus as Child.”

40. According to Luther, “Everyone acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement... We really must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and the world.” Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2009), 56.

of human existence that most needs healing because it is most obstructive of true relationship among human beings and between God and humankind.⁴¹

Rather than abandoning the metaphor of God as Father as irredeemable, Pais makes a thoroughgoing argument for recovering the true meaning of fatherhood through this central biblical image.

While not framed in terms of child liberation theology, other scholarly resources can serve this effort, including two works edited by Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in the Bible* and *The Child in Christian Thought*.⁴² For example, biblical scholarship can be placed in service of child liberation theology. Judith M. Gundry writes: “Mark’s Gospel illustrates how, in the light of the dawning of God’s kingdom in Jesus, children’s traditional social and religious inferiority can no longer justify their marginalization, but instead requires their emulation and devoted service by adult members of Jesus ‘family’ of disciples.”⁴³

Expressing themes belonging to the central concerns of child liberation theology, Walter Brueggemann states: “The implications for public policy concern the safety, dignity, respect, and economic wherewithal for every child, whose value is attested by the protection and care of society.”⁴⁴

Advocacy in child liberation theology

Child liberation theology advocates praxis to set children free from material deprivation, neglect, corporal punishment, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. This begins with churches, pastors, deacons, and other leaders interpreting the Bible and Christian teaching from the perspective of children, especially those who are suffering from any form of maltreatment and bondage. Child liberation theology takes seriously the research and social analysis that conclusively demonstrates the serious and lasting harm done to children through these forms of oppression.

Educational efforts among church members and the public need to be accompanied by a clear ethical stance guiding advocacy on behalf of vulnerable children. While many social messages and social statements of Christian denominations make references to the needs of children, it should be noted that none of these teachings have been devoted explicitly to social teaching and advocacy about the specific needs of children.⁴⁵

41. Pais, 77.

42. Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) and Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

43. Judith M. Gundry, “Children in the Gospel of Mark, with Special Attention to Jesus’ Blessing of the Children (Mark 10:13-16) and the Purpose of Mark,” in Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, 176.

44. Walter Brueggemann, “Vulnerable Children, Divine Passion, and Human Obligation,” in Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, 422.

45. See the social messages and social statements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, <https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>. Accessed 1 January 2018. The ELCA draft statement on “Women and Justice” takes a further step in identifying the social condition of the most vulnerable people as a point of departure for teaching and advocacy.

Child liberation theology takes seriously the research and social analysis that conclusively demonstrates the serious and lasting harm done to children through these forms of oppression.

The advocacy and educational praxis of child liberation theology should include the following measures:

1. Advocate for structural change to ensure that the needs of children for nutritious food, clean water, medical care, hygiene, and education are addressed as the highest economic and political priority.
2. Support measures to guarantee that the first 1,000 days of life (pregnancy through the second birthday) meet the nutritional and health care needs of every child.
3. Advocate for adequate support services to assist parents and families in meeting the basic physical, medical, mental health, emotional, social, and educational needs of children.
4. Promote educational efforts for parents and caretakers about responsible and effective child rearing practices.
5. Advocate for ending corporal punishment based on research that demonstrates how it contributes to the physical abuse of children.
6. Educate church members and the public that the Bible does not warrant corporal punishment and that, to the contrary, research demonstrates the harmful physical, mental health, behavioral, and spiritual damage done by corporal punishment.
7. Advocate for the end to all forms of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking, specifically of children.
8. Exercise leadership that certified child protection policies be developed and implemented by every congregation to guard against the sexual abuse of children.

For biblical and theological reasons the material, emotional, social, educational, and spiritual needs of children deserve the highest priority in the advocacy and educational efforts of the church. The retrieval of and commitment to child liberation theology can contribute to making the following goals core commitments of the church: freedom from material deprivation, freedom from neglect, freedom from corporal punishment and physical abuse, and freedom from sexual abuse. Together these core commitments can contribute to the liberation of children for the life-giving relationships that belong to the shalom of God.

The Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse and Exploitation: What Research Tells Us

Amy Russell, MEd, JD, NCC¹

*“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”
~ Psalm 147:3 (KJV)*

Introduction

While the percentage of adults in the United States who say they believe in G-d² appears to be declining, there is still a significant number of individuals who are more likely to turn to clergy for mental health issues than to a licensed mental health professional,³ including victims of abuse, exploitation and violence. Some friends or family members of those abused may also be more likely to turn to a spiritual leader for guidance before reporting suspected abuse or neglect to law enforcement or child protective services. When children experience abuse and trauma, there is an impact on their psychological development as well as their spiritual growth. Consequently, it is important that clergy and other religious leaders understand the impact child abuse has on individuals. To this end, this article provides an overview of research on the spiritual development of children and how violence may interrupt or impair spirituality.

Religious and spiritual development in children

Children undergo spiritual development in concert with their development of individual identity, autonomy, and self-awareness.⁴ As children seek understanding of their relationships and sense of

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belonging with others, they similarly seek meaning and purpose from their faith.⁵ Interactions with their primary caregivers provide guidance for children as they relate to others and the world around them. Primary caregivers also provide a foundation for religiosity and spirituality for children, and this foundation enables children to formulate their own worldview.⁶ It is upon these worldviews that children develop their personal understanding of love, justice, and truth.

Reinert and Edwards⁷ summarized research that suggests the attachments individuals have with G-d later in life are analogous to the attachments they have as children to their parents or caregivers. For example, if children have secure attachments with their parents, their relationship with G-d will correspond to that of their parents. Religious customs will likewise be mirrored, in that the child will likely have similar religious values and practices as their parents. For children with insecure attachments to parents who are not religious, Reinert and Edwards explain that children may compensate for these deficits in their attachment to G-d in later life. Children with insecure parental attachments may turn away from religion if their parents were very religious, or may seek out religion if their parents were not religious.⁸ Research also suggests

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2. Note: Throughout this article, the author follows Messianic Jewish and Jewish traditions to avoid the erasure or defacement of the Name of G-d, based in Deut 12:3-4. The Name of G-d should be treated with respect, and in this article, the Name is not written to avoid disrespect, defacing or erasing the Name.

3. Jennifer L. Farrell and Deborah A. Goebert, "Collaboration between Psychiatrists and Clergy in Recognizing and Treating Serious Mental Illness." *Psychiatric Services* 59 (2008): 437-440.

4. Thema Bryant-Davis, et al., "Religiosity, Spirituality, and Trauma Recovery in the Lives of Children and Adolescents." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 43:4 (2012): 307.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Duane F. Reinert and Carla E. Edwards, "Attachment Theory, Childhood Mistreatment, and Religiosity." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 1:1 (2009): 25-34.

8. Ibid.

that abuse occurring at younger ages is more likely to disrupt spiritual development.⁹ Older youth, who developed a stronger attachment to G-d and perceived G-d as benevolent, are more likely to turn to G-d for spiritual support following victimization.¹⁰

Research demonstrates that religion and spirituality serve as protective factors for youth in general, and more specifically, help provide resilience to violence and abuse witnessed or experienced in childhood.¹¹ Religion additionally serves as a protective factor against other forms of risky behaviors in youth, including drug and alcohol use, early sexual activities and engagement with deviant peer groups.¹² There is also a positive correlation between religiosity and positive school outcomes, including reduced incidences of school behavior problems, higher academic achievement and lower incidences of stress for youth in general.¹³ Affiliation with religion or spirituality provides youth with hope and optimism, and affords youth social approval and a sense of community.¹⁴

Religion and spirituality may also prove helpful to children and youth who experience abuse or trauma.¹⁵ The sense of belonging that comes with religious group identification can help mitigate feelings of isolation victimization can bring, and belief in a higher power or something greater than oneself may help promote optimism and a sense of hope following traumatic events.¹⁶ Spirituality also may assist victims of abuse to find meaning in their experiences, and help allay feelings of shame and culpability.¹⁷

Lessons children learn from violence, abuse, and exploitation

As youth, our faith or spirituality frequently starts with common beliefs, which include assumptions that the world is a fair place, and that bad things happen for a reason. We believe that the world generally is a safe place to be, and that our family and our G-d will protect us from harm; that bad things will not happen to us. We also believe that when people do bad things, bad things will happen to them. Whether referenced in this way or not, and regardless of religion, people frequently believe in the adage,

When children witness or experience violence, abuse, and exploitation, these foundational beliefs may be annihilated, especially when victimized at the hand of someone they love and upon whom they rely for basic needs and protection.

“You reap what you sow” (derived from Gal 6:5, 7).¹⁸ Youth also frequently believe—and often explicitly are taught—that G-d is loving, benevolent and just. These foundational beliefs allow us to trust in the goodness of others and keep us from being paralyzed by fear of harm as we move through our lives. Unfortunately, when children witness or experience violence, abuse, and exploitation, these foundational beliefs may be annihilated, especially when victimized at the hand of someone they love and upon whom they rely for basic needs and protection.

The overwhelming and devastating lessons that children learn from these traumatic experiences are: “(1) ‘I do not have control over my own body,’ (2) ‘The world is not a safe place for me,’ [and] (3) ... ‘[G-d], the Almighty One, did not step in to prevent it.’”¹⁹ After experiencing abuse, most children struggle to reconcile the reality of their victimization with previously learned values, beliefs, and assumptions about people and the world around them. They are left to comprehend how their abuser—more often than not a parent, relative, or family acquaintance—could betray their trust in such an unimaginable way.²⁰ Victims struggle with what implications their abuse has on them in their personal lives and on their sense of self; in their relationships with others; and in their relationship with and understandings and beliefs regarding their G-d, religious beliefs, or spirituality.²¹

It is important to remember that not all children or youth experience abuse in the same way, and how children react when victimized may vary widely. However, research has found some commonality in the dynamics children experience when abused. Schmutzer describes three realms of personhood that are impacted

9. Terry Lynn Gall, “Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 30(2006): 829–844.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 308–309.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.; Gall, 2006; Terry Lynn Gall et al., “Spirituality and the Current Adjustment of Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46:1(2007): 103.

15. Donald F. Walker et al., “Understanding and Responding to Changes in Spirituality and Religion after Traumatic Events” in Donald F. Walker et al., eds., *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy For Trauma* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2015), 150–151.

16. Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 308–309; Gall, 2006, 839.

17. Donald F. Walker et al., “Changes in Personal Religion/Spirituality During and After Childhood Abuse: A Review and Synthesis.” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 1(2009): 138–140; Walker et al., 2015, 150–153.

18. “For every man shall bear his own burden.” Gal 6:5 (KJV); “Be not deceived; G-d is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Gal 6:7 (KJV).

19. Andrew J. Schmutzer, “Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse: Embodiment, Community, and Healing.” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2:1(2009): 67.

20. Schmutzer, 2009, 67–86.

21. Kenneth I. Pargament, Nichole A. Murray-Swank and Annette Mahoney, “Problem and Solution: The Spiritual Dimension of Clergy Sexual Abuse and Its Impact on Survivors.” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 17:3–4(2008): 397–420; Schmutzer, 2009; Walker et al., 2009, 130–145.

by sexual victimization. These three realms—those of *Self*, *Community*, and *G-d*—are both segregated and interconnected parts of the unity of an individual, and each realm may be damaged by abuse, leaving the personhood fractured.²² Child victims of other forms of maltreatment, or witnesses to violence, may experience similar abuse dynamics.²³

The personal or physical *Self* experiences abuse on the offender's terms, and may result in somatic complaints, disrupted emotions, and psychological challenges. The individual learns that they have lost control of their bodies and normative sexual development is disrupted.²⁴ Victims of sexual abuse may despise their bodies or perceive sex as reprehensible or frightening.²⁵ Children may experience difficulties with sleep, develop eating disorders or express physical complaints following victimization.²⁶ Self-esteem may be negatively impacted, as they may perceive there is something wrong within themselves that caused them to be abused, or that they are unworthy of G-d's love and protection.²⁷ They may blame themselves for their victimization, and experience shame and embarrassment as a result of their experiences.²⁸

These feelings may be reinforced by reactions from others, who out of lack of knowledge or understanding, may respond inappropriately. Children frequently delay reporting abuse experiences out of a multitude of fears.²⁹ When asked, "Why didn't

22. Schmutzer, 2009, 70; see also Pargament et al., 2008.

23. Bette L. Bottoms, Michael Nielsen, Rebecca Murray and Henrietta Filipas, "Religion-related Child Physical Abuse: Characteristics and Psychological Outcomes." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 8:1-2(2003), 87-114; Gail Hornor, "Child Neglect: Assessment and Intervention." *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 28:2(2014), 186-192; Jo Ann Unger and Rayleen V. De Luca, "The Relationship Between Childhood Physical Abuse and Adult Attachment Styles." *Journal of Family Violence* 29(2014): 223-234.

24. David Finkelhor and Angela Browne. "The Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Conceptualization." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 55:4(1985), 530-541; Gemma McKibbin, Cathy Humphreys, and Bridget Hamilton. "'Talking About Child Sexual Abuse Would Have Helped Me': Young People Who Sexually Abused Reflect On Preventing Harmful Sexual Behavior." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 70(2017): 210-221; Schmutzer, 2009, 71-73.

25. Pargament et al., 2008, 402-403.

26. Schmutzer, 2009, 71-73.

27. Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 309.

28. Marion Bilich, Susan Bonfiglio, and Steven Carlson. *Shared Grace: Therapists and Clergy Working Together*. (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2000); Delphine Collin-Vézina, Mireille De La Sablonnière-Griffin, Andrea M. Palmer, and Lise Milne, "A Preliminary Mapping of Individual, Relational, and Social Factors That Impede Disclosure of Childhood Sexual Abuse." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 43(2015): 125, 128; Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, 532-533, 535; David Katzenstein and Lisa Aronson Fontes, "Twice Silenced: The Underreporting of Child Sexual Abuse in Orthodox Jewish Communities." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 26:6(2017): 753, 756, 758-759, 762-763; Amy C. Tishelman and Lisa A. Fontes, "Religion in Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interviews." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 63(2017): 120-130.

29. Rosaleen McElvaney, Sheila Greene, and Diane Hogan, "To Tell or Not To Tell? Factors Influencing Young People's Informal Disclosures of Child Sexual Abuse." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29:5 (2014): 928-947; Paula Schaeffer, John M. Leventhal, and Andrea Gottsegen Asnes, "Children's Disclosures of Sexual Abuse: Learning

Self-esteem may be negatively impacted, as they may perceive there is something wrong within themselves that caused them to be abused, or that they are unworthy of G-d's love and protection. They may blame themselves for their victimization, and experience shame and embarrassment as a result of their experiences.

you tell sooner?", children may take that to mean that they did something wrong by not immediately reporting their abuse, or that any abuse that occurred after the first incidence is their own fault for not immediately telling someone. Questions about what children were wearing, why they were with certain people or in certain areas and how they interacted with the offender might also imply culpability.

Within church communities, these dynamics are often magnified. One of the factors causing children to delay in reporting abuse is the social norm to not talk about sex or sexual parts with others.³⁰ In religious communities, these topics are even more taboo, and individuals who engage in sexual activities outside of marriage are denounced. This conspiracy of silence mutes child victims and emboldens offenders. Children may implicitly or explicitly be taught that they are "damaged goods" or that they are forever unclean or unlovable as a result of their victimization. On more than one occasion, girls have expressed to this author that they will be unable to marry or be condemned to hell because they are no longer virgins.³¹ This author is also aware of multiple instances of abuse in church communities where both the offender and the victim were prayed over for forgiveness of the sins they both committed: "For this is the will of G-d, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication..."³²

When children begin to see themselves as culpable or unclean, or when they believe that they deserved the abuse they experienced, they may engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as running away, interacting with inappropriate peer groups or using drugs or al-

from Direct Inquiry." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 35(2011): 343-352.

30. Collin-Vézina et al., 2015, 131; Tishelman and Fontes, 2017, 124-126.

31. "If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar." Song Sol 8:9 (KJV); "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers G-d will judge." Heb 13:4 (KJV).

32. 1 Thess 4:3 (KJV).

cohol.³³ Children who have been victimized may also experience ongoing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, fear, anxiety, depression or aggression toward others. They may also engage in self-mutilation and suicidal ideation or attempts.³⁴ Youth with weaker attachments to their caretakers, or to G-d, may demonstrate more of these behaviors.³⁵

When someone experiences trauma or abuse, the social or relational *Community* may become isolated from others.³⁶ The very experience an individual has may make them feel alienated from friends and family. When offenders tell victims not to report their experiences, children are isolated from their support systems. The violence suffered reveals to the victims that the world around them is not safe. Trust has been destroyed, and the support they may have felt prior to their abuse is no longer available to them. When children are taught that G-d is a parental figure, and subsequently experience abuse at the hands of a parent or caregiver, their image of G-d may become distorted.³⁷

Generally speaking, we are all social animals, who seek companionship and affinity with others. Our relationships with our friends, our family and our G-d help define us; however, individuals who are victimized often feel ostracized from their community and rejected by their G-d.³⁸ Interpersonal issues may be negatively impacted by victimization. When trust is violated by abuse, victims may attribute feelings and expectations they had for the offender to new relationships they develop with others, resulting in difficulty maintaining appropriate relationships.³⁹ This may further serve to isolate and stigmatize victims of abuse.

Additionally, victims may feel isolated from assistance and support available outside of their religious community based on the responses they receive from their spiritual or religious leaders. Some religions, sects, or congregations rely upon the “two-witness rule” rooted in Deut 19:15.⁴⁰ As most victimization occurs with only the victim and the perpetrator present, this rule effectively muzzles victims from being believed or finding justice in their religious communities. Offenders may also use their position of authority in religious institutions to manipulate and coerce children into compliance, or to intimidate and coerce them into silence.⁴¹

33. Gall, 2006, 830; Roland C. Summit, “The Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome.” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 7(1983): 185–186.

34. Bilich et al., 2000.

35. Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 311; Gall, 2006, 838, 840.

36. Schmutzer, 2009, 73–75.

37. Bilich et al., 2000; Reinert & Edwards, 2009, 26–27; Schmutzer, 2009, 73–75; Walker et al., 2015, 148–150.

38. Schmutzer, 2009, 73–75.

39. Bilich et al., 2000; Gall, 2006, 838; Schmutzer, 2009, 73–75.

40. “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.” Deut 19:15 (KJV).

41. Bette L. Bottoms et al., “Religion-Related Child Maltreatment: A Profile of Cases Encountered by Legal and Social Service Agencies.” *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 33 (2015): 561–579; Katzenstein and Fontes, 2017, 759–761; Tishelman and Fontes, 2017, 123.

Multiple religious institutions have been found complicit in covering up abuse occurring in their purview.⁴² In one case example, when law enforcement officers attempted to conduct interviews with alleged child victims of abuse, ages ranging from three to seventeen years, each child refused to talk about what they had allegedly experienced or witnessed, stating by rote, “What G-d has forgiven has been forgotten.”

Victims who go against the teachings of their religious community may find themselves excommunicated from membership or shunned by their families, who rely upon 1 Cor 5:13.⁴³ When abuse is at the hands of an offender of the same sex as the victim, particularly abuse of and by a male, the topic is even more proscribed. Offenders of same-sex victimization may themselves use scripture to coerce silence from the victim, quoting Lev 20:13 (KJV): “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”

Schmutzer explains that the realm of *G-d*, identified as the religious or transcendent part of personhood, is similarly negatively impacted when an individual experiences abuse or trauma. Victims who previously perceived G-d as just may interpret that they were being punished or condemned to abuse by G-d for some misdeed they committed, or that noncompliance may result in “going to hell.”⁴⁴ Those who identify with G-d as a father- or parent-figure may experience spiritual or religious conflict if they were abused by someone in a paternal or caregiving role.⁴⁵ Individuals abused by religious leaders, who serve as a link to G-d and offer hope and redemption, may interpret that G-d himself was the offender.⁴⁶

Children who had previously perceived G-d as prescient, benevolent, and omnipotent may begin to question why they were targeted for abuse or how a loving G-d would allow them

42. David A. Wolfe, Peter G. Jaffe, Jennifer L. Jetté, and Samantha E. Poisson, “The Impact of Child Abuse in Community Institutions and Organizations: Advancing Professional and Scientific Understanding.” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10:2(2003): 179–191; see, e.g., “Victims ‘told not to report’ Jehovah’s Witness child abuse.” (2017, November 20). Retrieved from www.bbcnews.com; Monk, J. (2017, October 13). “Lawsuit accuses Columbia’s First Baptist Church of history of covering up child sex abuse.” *The State*. Retrieved from www.thestate.com; Park, M. (2017, June 29). “Timeline: A look at the Catholic Church’s sex abuse scandals.” Retrieved from www.cnn.com; Boone, R. (2017, May 1). “Men file sex abuse lawsuit against Boy Scouts, LDS Church.” Retrieved from www.news.hjnews.com; Browne, R. (2017, March 27). “Survivors have waited too long: 4000 institutions named in sex abuse inquiry.” *The Queanbeyan Age Chronicle*. Retrieved from www.queanbeyanagechronical.com.au; Smith, R. (2017, March 16). “Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to change two-witness rule because ‘that’s our stand.’” Retrieved from www.news.com.au; Wolfson, E. (2016, March 3). “Child abuse allegations plague the Hasidic community.” *Newsweek*. Retrieved from www.newsweek.com.

43. “But them that are without G-d judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” 1 Cor 5:13 (KJV).

44. Schmutzer, 2009, 73–75.

45. Gall et al., 2007, 109; Pargament et al., 2008, 403; Walker et al., 2009, 132.

46. Bottoms et al., 2015, 563–565; Pargament et al., 2008, 403.

to experience such trauma.⁴⁷ Following abuse, they may perceive G-d as controlling, vengeful, and distant.⁴⁸ Victims who receive messages such as, “It’s all in G-d’s plan” or “Everything happens for a reason” before, or even after, they have fully processed their abuse may feel disaffected and withdraw from the church community, which may be their strongest—or only—existing support network. Spiritual leaders who proffer verses such as Jer 29:11 in attempts to help victims find meaning in their abuse or move victims toward an understanding of G-d’s plan for them may only serve to frustrate, confuse, and alienate them.⁴⁹

Children are often taught metaphors about G-d as a father-figure and a protector: “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the L-rd thy G-d, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”⁵⁰ When victimized, this analogy is obfuscated when victims believe that G-d was absent when they needed protection, or was present but didn’t care. Victims may feel abandoned in their time of need, and may even begin to doubt G-d’s existence, turning away from religion, which otherwise may have served as a positive coping strategy.⁵¹

It is not uncommon for offenders to use religion in the context of their abuse of children, or to rationalize or explain their behaviors, adulterating biblical teachings for their own illicit purposes.⁵² Relying upon the verse, “So G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d created He him; male and female created He them,”⁵³ an offender justified his victimization of his daughter saying that his actions were sanctioned by G-d because he was “made in G-d’s image.”⁵⁴ A child who is repeatedly raped after nightly prayers to keep her and her family safe is indoctrinated by her abuser, who tells her that if G-d didn’t want the abuse to occur, G-d would have stopped the offender and kept the child safe. In the alternative, a child is told that the abuse he endures is punishment for wrong-doing.⁵⁵ Children are also condemned for disobedience of an abusive parent, with offenders relying upon verses such as Deut 27:16.⁵⁶

Clearly, the spiritual impact victims may suffer is profound and enduring. Interventions should seek to address not only the mental health implications victimization bears, but spiritual ones as well. Collaborations between spiritual or religious leaders and

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mental health providers may result in the best outcomes for victims suffering spiritual injuries as a result of abuse.⁵⁷

A word about forgiveness

When working with individuals who have experienced abuse and exploitation, it is important not only to understand how victimization impacts them, but also how forgiveness is addressed. “The unrealistic expectation for children to put the abuse behind them and remember it no more or for the [offender] to repent and sin no more also has devastating consequences for the traumatized victims.”⁵⁸ As discussed previously, it is common for victims to experience feelings of anger and betrayal about their victimization. It is imperative that those who have been victimized are not pushed to forgive their offenders before they are ready. If forgiveness is offered, it must be on the timetable of the individual victimized, and victims should be granted as much time as they need to arrive at that point. To do otherwise is to delegitimize their feelings and their personal recovery process.⁵⁹ Forcing a victim to prematurely forgive may be interpreted as another instance of controlling the victim, and may serve to re-traumatize him or her. Furthermore, a victim should not be pushed to pray for forgiveness for any “sins” she or he committed as part of the victimization, as the offender alone is responsible for the abuse.

Family, friends, and spiritual leaders can all assist in the recovery process after victimization.⁶⁰ This includes helping victims move toward forgiveness of their perpetrator if possible; however, forgiveness should be approached as a process, not an immediate obligation.⁶¹ It is widely recognized that holding on to anger toward another has detrimental effects on an individual, including depression and anxiety.⁶² While forgiveness will ultimately look

47. Bilich et al., 2000.

48. Pargament et al., 2008, 405; Reinert and Edwards, 2009, 27, 29–31.

49. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the L-rd, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” Jer 29:11 (KJV).

50. Deut 31:6 (KJV).

51. Bilich et al., 2000; Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 310–311; Gall, 2006; Schmutzer, 2009, 75–77.

52. See, e.g., Katzenstein and Fontes, 2017; Tishelman and Fontes, 2017; Wolfe et al., 2003.

53. Gen 1:27 (KJV).

54. Examples are based on actual child abuse cases.

55. “The L-rd preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked He turneth upside down.” Ps 146:9 (KJV).

56. “Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.” Deut. 27:16 (KJV).

57. See Singer article in this issue for more information; see also Bilich et al., 2000.

58. Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 311, citing T. Doyle, “The Spiritual Trauma Experienced by Victims of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy.” *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 239–260.

59. Bilich et al., 2000.

60. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Chr-st.” Gal 6:2 (KJV).

61. Bilich et al., 2000; Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 310–311; Pargament et al., 2008, 412–413.

62. Sharon Lamb, “Forgiveness Therapy: The Context and Conflict.” *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 25:1(2005), 61–80.

different for different people, forgiveness of an offender can be reframed for victims as a healing benefit for themselves, and not as religious obligation or gift to the offender.⁶³

Many point to scripture as a means to motivate victims to forgive their offenders.⁶⁴ However, pressure from others to extend forgiveness before the victim is ready to do so may leave the victim feeling guilty and ashamed for not wanting to do so or not being ready to do so, and may lead the victim to resent those who prematurely push for forgiveness.⁶⁵ Furthermore, pressure to forgive too soon may drive the victim away from his or her church community, particularly when feeling pressured with the victim's own salvation: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."⁶⁶ When victims perceive that their G-d has already forsaken them by allowing the abuse to occur, or believe that they were somehow at fault for their own victimization, verses such as this serve to further alienate the victim from G-d and their religious communities.

Forgiveness of the offender should be reframed as a progressive, healing step from anger to peace, and from pain to happiness.⁶⁷ This reframing should also serve to educate the victim that forgiveness does not exculpate the offender from his or her actions. The offender is still accountable for the abuse inflicted. Additionally, forgiveness does not require the victim to forget that the abuse occurred.⁶⁸ In fact, when considering legal implications in abuse cases, if a parent who was abused as a child allows her child to have unsupervised contact with the parent's abuser, this could be considered negligent parenting and result in child welfare interventions. Similarly, there may be criminal or civil consequences for a parent who allows an offender to continue to have contact with a child victim. Prayer and forgiveness should not replace formal interventions of child victimization.⁶⁹ Furthermore, just because someone forgives his or her offender, reconciliation with that individual should not be considered mandatory, especially if the perpetrator is not truly repentant for his or her offenses.⁷⁰

As part of the forgiveness and recovery process, it is also important that spiritual leaders reframe for victims the distortions in religious beliefs that may have occurred as a result of the victimiza-

Overcoming spiritual and cognitive distortions forged by the hands of another is a difficult, but not impossible, task. Finding meaning and making sense of victimization is possible through positive religious and spiritual coping mechanisms.

tion, including those that were perverted by the offender in the context of the abuse itself.⁷¹ Victims may need spiritual guidance in understanding that regardless of whether they are able to extend forgiveness, they are not responsible for the salvation of the offender. Here, some have turned to Jewish law for guidance in *Maimonides' Code, Laws of Repentance 2:9*. Forgiveness for offenses between individuals requires sincere *teshuvah*, or repentance, for past transgressions of the victim by the offender. This atonement is for the offender's sin against another individual; the offender still must atone for sins committed against G-d.

Conclusion

Victims often feel culpable, ashamed, and isolated as a result of their abuse experiences. They not only suffer from the physical and psychological impact of their victimization, but also the spiritual repercussions. Overcoming spiritual and cognitive distortions forged by the hands of another is a difficult, but not impossible, task. Finding meaning and making sense of victimization is possible through positive religious and spiritual coping mechanisms. Individuals victimized as a child need to know that the abuse wasn't their fault and their abuse was not a condemnation by G-d, but the wrongful and illegal act of another human being. Understanding the various ways victims experience their abuse is critical for effective interventions by religious and mental health professionals.

63. There is some research noting a correlation between forgiveness and reduced characteristics associated with trauma. Katie G. Reinhert, Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Karen Bandeen-Roche, Jerry W. Less, and Sarah Szanton, "The Role of Religious Involvement in the Relationship Between Early Trauma and Health Outcomes Among Adult Survivors," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 9 (2016): 231–241.

64. *e.g.*, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as G-d for Chr-st's sake hath forgiven you." Eph 4:32 (KJV).

65. Bilich et al., 2000; Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 310–311; Pargament et al., 2008, 412–413.

66. Matt 6:14–15 (KJV).

67. Pargament et al., 2008, 412–413.

68. Bilich et al., 2000; Bryant-Davis et al., 2012, 310–311; Pargament et al., 2008, 412–413.

69. Tishelman and Fontes, 2017, 124–125.

70. Bilich et al., 2000.

71. *Ibid.*

Preventing Abuse in Christian Organizations That Serve Youth: Ten Policies to Create Safer Environments¹

Shira M. Berkovits²

It is critical for leaders of youth-serving organizations (YSOs)³ to adopt child-protection policies proactively, before they are faced with a problem. Policies clarify acceptable and unacceptable behaviors that guide adults⁴ to model safe interactions with children. When a policy is well communicated, it becomes integral to institutional culture and its violations are easily identifiable, making it possible for bystanders to intervene and institutions to respond. Without policies, leaders may forget or dismiss important response steps, become more susceptible to pressure, and introduce their organizations to increased liability.⁵ Having a policy provides organizations with a plan to act on before a situation escalates. Finally, a good policy can function as a deterrent, sending a clear message to potential abusers: Abuse is not tolerated here and will be reported immediately.

The following are ten recommendations for inclusion in an organization's policy. This list is meant as a starting point for conversation, and is not exhaustive.⁶ Organizations should consult

1. This article has been adapted from its original publication in the *JOFA Journal* Fall 2015/Winter 2016 Edition, available at www.jofa.org/education-jofa-journal/preventing-abuse-our-jewish-communities-fall-2015-winter-2016/preventing; reprinted with permission.

2. Shira Berkovits, Ph.D.; JD, is a behavioral psychologist, attorney, and founder of Sacred Spaces (www.jewishspaces.org), a national non-profit organization that works with youth-serving organizations in Jewish communities to prevent and respond to abuse through policy development and training.

3. "Youth-serving organization" (YSO) is a term referring to any organization that provides services or programming for youth, including churches, camps, schools, clubs, and community centers.

4. For the sake of simplicity, the term "adult" is used throughout this article. In reality though, roughly one-third of the sexual abuse known to police to be perpetrated against children in the United States is perpetrated by other youth. See Finkelhor, D., Omrod, R. and Chaffin, M. (2009). *Juveniles Who Commit Sex Offenses Against Minors*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227763.pdf.

5. In fact, many insurance agencies no longer provide liability insurance to churches without documentation of a policy. Others require a policy as a prerequisite for reduced rates or greater liability coverage.

6. For more detailed information on developing an organizational policy, see Basyle Tchividjian & Shira M. Berkovits *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017); Janet Saul & Natalie Audage, *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2007); and Vieth, V. I. "Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies

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with child protection experts when considering these suggestions, as guidelines that reduce risk in one organization or setting may increase risk in another.⁷

1. Screen prospective employees and/or volunteers.

Individuals who sexually abuse⁸ children do not end up in YSOs by accident; they work hard to get there. This makes sense—YSOs provide easy access to children and give a respectable cover to perpetrators. However, many YSOs do not screen prospective hires and volunteers—or do so only minimally. When possible, screenings should include a criminal background check; a check of the state's central registry for perpetrators of child abuse and neglect; Internet/social media searches of an individual's names, nicknames, screen names, and email addresses; an interview; and reference checks. An organization's policy developers should consider instituting screening measures for employees and volunteers; lay leaders; subcontractors (e.g., bus drivers, catering staff, course instructors); hosts within or without the community; visitors who

on Child Maltreatment," *Jacob's Hope*, 2:1 (2011), 1–8.

7. For example, a policy that prohibits adults from entering the changing or sleeping quarters of youth would reduce the risk of adult-on-child abuse, but increase the risk of peer-on-peer abuse. This does not mean that the rule should be discarded, only that YSOs should consult with experts in child protection to ensure that their policies account for these and other risks.

8. Child abusers seeking access to boys or girls in a youth-serving organization are primarily seeking children to sexually abuse. However, they often target children who have already been abused in multiple ways. Accordingly, we need to be alert to signs of multiple forms of abuse. Heather A. Turner, David Finkelhor, and Richard Omrod, "Poly-Victimization in a National Sample of Children and Youth," 38(3) *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 38.3 (2010): 323.

request hospitality; and others who have repeated interactions with children (e.g., choir directors) or hold the keys to communal spaces. Not all screening measures are appropriate or practical for all individuals, but organizations should try to anticipate the various categories of individuals who will come in contact with children and determine which screening mechanisms to employ.

2. Maximize visibility.

Most individuals who abuse children are known or trusted by their victims, the victims' families, and the community at large. Like anyone seeking to commit a harmful act, these individuals will often look for private opportunities to perpetrate their crimes. One way to protect children from abuse is to maximize visibility when designing or renovating a building; it is preferable to opt for open layouts, glass walls, well-lit spaces, and windows in all doors. Once a building is in operation, unused spaces should be locked and frequently used spaces should be supervised. Caregivers, who would not allow their children to wander unattended around malls or public parks, should likewise not allow them to roam unattended in communal spaces full of familiar faces (e.g., church bathrooms, halls, and empty classrooms).

Finally, policies should require the presence of at least two adults at all youth programs or meetings. When this is not possible, policies should require that all activities be observable and interruptible. Adults should never meet one-on-one with a child in a closed environment. In addition, YSOs can extend open invitations to caregivers to attend programs or meetings. These invitations function as more than just a considerate accommodation; they set the tone for a safe and transparent organization and reassure caregivers that the organization is serious about limiting opportunities for child abuse.

3. Know all participants.

Registration for youth events is necessary so staff can respond appropriately in the event of an emergency. Moreover, it is the YSO's responsibility to know where all children are during an event, which is difficult if attendance is unclear. Unfortunately, not all churches require youth registration, and staff may not even know the names of participating children. If a child were ill or injured, for example, precious time would be wasted trying to find the caregivers or obtaining important medical information. Moreover, if a child were to wander off or be picked up by an undesignated adult, identifying or even noticing the missing child would be difficult.

4. Plan for dismissals.

Dismissal from youth events can be crowded and chaotic, especially in large organizations. Without protocols to guide the process, staff may be required to make split-second judgments that may be inaccurate or unsafe. For instance, in a day camp, a visiting grandfather was permitted to retrieve his granddaughter, despite the fact that the counselors had never met him before nor even

Reassure caregivers that the organization is serious about limiting opportunities for child abuse.

known that he would be in town. Allowing someone other than the designated caregiver to pick up a child can lead to confusion—or even panic when the caregiver comes to retrieve the child and the child isn't there. More seriously, it allows for the possibility that a congregant or family member seeking to abuse a child may pick up the child by claiming to be doing the caregiver a favor. It also permits a stranger to pretend to be a friend or relative to gain access to a child for abusive purposes. YSOs should prohibit the release of a child to anyone other than the designated caregiver without express permission in advance.

5. Define interaction boundaries.

Individuals who sexually abuse children often commence the abuse with inappropriate touching in order to test the tolerance of those around them. These interactions may begin by creating opportunities for nonsexual or accidental touch, or by being overly physical with a child. If the touching behaviors go unnoticed by bystanders or by the child, the perpetrator may feel emboldened to push the boundaries further. To help bystanders halt inappropriate touching, the YSO must define appropriate and inappropriate touch. At the most basic level, touch of a child that is unwanted or intended to sexually gratify should never be permitted. Touch that violates social or religious norms for a particular community, or touch that has the appearance of abusive touch, is problematic as well.

Beyond this, YSOs and their advisors must decide where to draw the line on touching; their policies should include examples of both acceptable (e.g., holding young children's hands) and unacceptable (e.g., wrestling) forms of touch. Formalizing these limits provides staff and children with clear boundaries, enhances adult-child relationships by encouraging safe touch, minimizes opportunities for abuse, and makes instances of inappropriate touching immediately identifiable. YSOs should also develop policies regarding communication with youth, including whether and how adults can phone, text, email, or use social media to contact a child,⁹ and prohibiting the use of sexual jokes, innuendo, behaviors, or comments about bodies to and around children.

6. Maintain policies off-premises.

Policies developed for the YSO must also apply off-premises. When generating a list of outside activities or events that might reasonably occur during the year, the YSO should contemplate those extra

9. The Jacob Wetterling Resource Center has a sample social media policy organizations may wish to consider: <http://www.gundersenhealth.org/ncptc/jacob-wetterling-resource-center/keep-kids-safe/online-safety/social-networking/> (last visited November 8, 2017).

precautions. Situations to consider include transportation to or from events, overnights and mission trips; staff or volunteers offering to babysit; religious studies tutoring; taking one child or a small group of children on a special trip or for a treat; and hosting events at a community or staff member's home (e.g., Bible study).

7. Institute extra safety precautions in high-risk venues.

Any situation in which adults and children are naked or partly naked together presents an inherent risk to children's safety and requires additional safeguards. High risk venues include gyms, changing rooms, bathrooms, saunas, steam rooms, and swimming pools. Policies for high-risk venues might include requiring children to be accompanied by a responsible adult at all times (e.g., parents must accompany children to the Y's gym), scheduling additional supervisors (e.g., three counselors must supervise shower time, rather than the standard two), prohibiting nudity in public spaces (e.g., installing private change booths in a gym's locker room), designating certain spaces for the exclusive use of children (e.g., ensuring that students and teachers have their own bathrooms at school), or creating special children's hours (e.g., children's swim).

8. Emphasize training.

Training is a key component in shaping child-protection attitudes and behaviors in the community. Even the most comprehensive policy cannot protect children without accompanying training. The best training package will include education for all members of the community. Children should be taught anatomically correct terms for their bodies, which areas on their bodies are private, comfort with politely demanding respect for their own personal space, and permission to disobey an adult if ordered to break the rules or keep a secret from their caregiver(s). In addition, children should be able to identify five adults whom they would trust with a concern or problem and be taught to seek help from them if someone acts in a way that makes them feel confused, scared, or uncomfortable. Of course, even trained children should never be expected to protect themselves from abuse. Staff, volunteers, and adult constituents should be well versed in the terms of the organization's policy, educated about abuse, trained to model safe behavior, taught to recognize indicators and precursors of abuse (e.g., grooming behaviors), and required to report all suspicions or knowledge of abuse.

9. Develop protocols for responding.

No matter how committed a community is to protecting its children, when faced with an instance of ongoing or historic abuse by an individual who is trusted, loved, or simply known, leaders may freeze, enter a state of disbelief, and, even with the best of intentions, become muddled.¹⁰ This is when having a policy becomes

absolutely critical. If the institution has thought through these issues calmly in advance, its leaders should be expected to follow the policy; if they do not, the community can insist on it. Policies about responding to abuse should address supporting the victim; preventing further abuse of the same victim or others; reporting the abuse to the authorities and *not* trying to handle the matter internally; retaining an outside expert; determining what access, if any, the perpetrator may continue to have to the institution and children; and alerting the community.

Policies must also address instances of behavior that are not known to be abusive but do violate the protocols or are otherwise concerning. Because one rarely catches an individual abusing a child and children often do not disclose their abuse, these behaviors might be the only indicators of wrongdoing. Therefore, policies must also address responses to these situations, such as bringing in an outside expert to advise, conducting a risk assessment, or launching an investigation; and determining what, if any, limitations should be placed on an individual's access to the institution and children.

10. Protect from known risks.

Under a variety of circumstances, an individual known to pose a risk to children may be found in a community. These include an individual who was previously convicted of abusing a child; an accused individual who was not convicted, perhaps due to a technicality (e.g., the statute of limitations had run); a person against whom unresolved allegations are pending (e.g., an investigation or trial is under way); or an individual who has engaged in concerning behaviors but has not (yet) been accused of abusing a child. A YSO is not a court of law, and no standard evidentiary requirement must be met before an institution can take precautionary actions to protect children. The policy should aid leaders in determining how much, if any, access such individuals are granted to the institution and the children within it. The policy should address how and when to enlist an outside expert, meet with law enforcement, develop a safe-engagement plan or limited access agreement, bar the individual completely from any sort of participation, alert the community to the individual's status, and support the individual's efforts to prevent a relapse.

Conclusion

Whatever an institution's policy is, it must be readily accessible and communicated to the entire organization; policy violations should meet with clear, predetermined consequences. An individual who is aware of the policy, yet is seemingly unable to abide by its terms, should be a cause for concern, subject to dismissal, and trigger an institutional response.

10. For a more complete discussion of this dynamic, see Shira M. Berkovits, "Institutional Abuse in the Jewish Community," *Tradition* 50(2) (2017): 11–49.

In the Footsteps of Mary and Joseph: The Role of Adult and Child Education in the Prevention of Abuse

Alison Feigh¹

“Safety and security don’t just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear.”
— Nelson Mandela²

All major religious traditions prioritize the importance of addressing the needs and concerns of marginalized individuals and communities.³ Creating safe spaces for children to grow and question is not just a good idea, it also aligns as a mandate in a wide spectrum of religious texts. As one example, when Joseph, Mary, and the Wise Men learned the baby Jesus was in danger, the Bible tells us that each of these adults took concrete steps to prevent abuse (Matt 2:1–21). Years later, when the boy Jesus was missing, we are told his parents diligently searched for him until they knew he was safe (Luke 2:41–52).

Unfortunately, many faith communities have not followed the example of Mary and Joseph in acting to prevent abuse or neglect. When it comes to personal safety or other prevention education, members of the faith community may become squeamish when lessons about bodies, especially with correct body terminology, are taking place in a house of worship. Moreover, prevention education reminds us that abuse can and does happen in faith communities and this reality makes us uncomfortable.

If faith communities are to become Safe Spaces for children, four things must happen. First, adults must take ownership of their role in the prevention of abuse and neglect. Second, adults must be educated so that they implement and enforce prevention policies and training and are otherwise vigilant in protecting the children God has placed in their care. Third, children should receive personal safety education as a tool which may prevent some abuse or empower a child to disclose maltreatment. Fourth, faith communities must evaluate and continually improve their prevention programming.

1. Alison Feigh is the program manager of the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center, a program of Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center.

2. <https://www.inspirationalstories.com/quotes/nelson-mandela-safety-and-security-dont-just-happen-they/> accessed February 23, 2018.

3. Stephen Hammer and Malia Robinson, *Partnering with Religious Communities for Children* (UNICEF 2015).

When Joseph, Mary, and the Wise Men learned the baby Jesus was in danger, the Bible tells us that each of these adults took concrete steps to prevent abuse (Matt 2:1–21). Years later, when the boy Jesus was missing, we are told his parents diligently searched for him until they knew he was safe (Luke 2:41–52).

Adult ownership

Investing in prevention means taking adult ownership of the problem. Personal safety should never rest solely on the shoulders of a child. Children can be given skills to help them communicate about safety, such as being taught about body safety rules, identify trusted adults to connect to if someone is ignoring or breaking safety rules, and problem solve different “What If” scenarios around safety, but a child should not own the responsibility for prevention. It is one strategy to teach a child to tell if someone is violating their boundaries, but there should also be education offered to the person that they might tell so that person feels empowered to act on behalf of a child even when the offender is a person in a position of power. There should also be education explaining why most children do not disclose abuse so that there isn’t an unrealistic expectation that a child will always tell if there is a problem. There should be policies, screening, monitoring, and training in place to help prevent someone with bad intentions from ever being in a position of power with children.⁴ Giving children tools to empower them in safety can be a very positive

4. A helpful resource that walks congregations through this process is: Basyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017).

step forward, but it cannot be the only step.

Those who harm look for opportunities to be in positions of power. Children and youth are at a disadvantage as they traditionally are not in positions of power in faith communities. It is the responsibility of individuals to not cause harm to children and for communities, including faith communities, to own prevention of child maltreatment and make child safety a priority.⁵ Prevention programs that empower children are one piece of a much larger puzzle to get ahead of the problem of child sexual abuse. The responsibility to prevent should be spread out across individuals, organizations, and social structures, such as a faith community. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, “Changing the behavior of adults and communities, rather than the behavior of children, is the ideal way to prevent child sexual abuse.”⁶

Educate adults

Adult ownership includes providing sexual abuse prevention education to adults. Increasing the knowledge for adults through offered education programs can help parents and other adults recognize danger signals.⁷ Grooming is one such danger signal. The grooming process begins with identifying potential victims, gaining their trust, and breaking down their defenses, which can lead to isolating and controlling behavior.⁸ Grooming behavior, using power in a relationship dynamic to break down boundaries, does happen in faith communities. Sex offenders may not only groom children but will often groom families and other community members as the means of beginning an association with a child that they are attempting to harm.⁹

Offenders can recognize ideal settings to exploit children and, in many cases, the traits of faith communities can put children at risk.¹⁰ The trusting nature and family feel of faith communities can create a setting where abuse is not considered as a problem. In fact, those traits elevate the need for education. One of the many ways that grooming is used is the offender attempts to “define the reality” for both the targets and the extended community so that the abuser can control the perspectives of others.¹¹ As one example, if the community is conditioned to be used to all of

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the children wrestling with the same one adult between services, the group perspective can quickly conclude that the behavior is nothing to worry about because it is what has always been done. If, instead, the adult is approached and reminded that through policy and through training, it has been decided that wrestling behavior is not a community norm, the reality remains defined by the community and not the individual acting out. If the adult means well, they can accept the correction as they move within the community norms. If the adult is attempting to lower inhibitions and test boundaries, they are reminded that this community holds each other accountable.

In prevention education and discussion scenarios for both adults and young people, it is important to put the focus on the behavior of the person and not on the relationship. It can be tempting to explain behavior away when the person is known and trusted, but it is important that the boundaries and expectations remain consistent for all. In prevention work, the focus should not be on how well-known a person is, but rather how the person is acting. It is critical to be mindful of the fact that most people who make the choice to harm children are known and trusted by the child and often liked by the community. The child’s willingness to say “no” will vary depending on how they know or do not know the person,¹² so children should also be reminded that if they freeze or don’t say no, it is still not their fault and they can still ask for help. Adults, too, should be reminded that people that we know, like, and trust can be the same people who cause harm. As James Lapine puts it so succinctly in the musical, *Into the Woods*, “Nice is different than good.”

The problem of sexual abuse is complex and must be looked at comprehensively. As stated by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Sexual violence does not occur from one single cause, but instead through an environment, physical and/or social, bred with increased risk factors and decreased protective factors.”¹³

5. Martyniuk, H., Dworkin, E. *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: Programs for Children* (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2011), 3.

6. Ibid.

7. Richard Wortley and Stephen Smallbone, “Applying situational principles to sexual offenses against children,” in *Situational Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse* Vol. 19, eds. Richard Wortley and Stephen Smallbone. (Monsey, N.Y.: Criminal Justice Press, 2006), 7–35.

8. <http://victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/grooming-dynamic-of-csa>

9. Anne-Marie Mcalinden, “Setting ‘Em Up: Personal, Familial and Institutional Grooming in the Sexual Abuse of Children,” *Social and Legal Studies* 15(3)(2006): 339–362.

10. Anna Salter, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders*. (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 29.

11. Maureen Farrell Garcia, “Groomed for Abuse,” *Christianity Today* (January 2015).

12. Kenneth V. Lanning and Park Dietz, “Acquaintance Molestation and Youth Serving Organizations,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 29 (2014), 2815–2838.

13. *Sexual Violence Prevention: Risk and Protective Factors*, (Centers for Disease Control: December 2017) available at: <https://>

There is not one solution, but instead multiple opportunities for faith communities to engage in prevention. Comprehensive public health approaches are required in prevention efforts with interventions that target:

- Offenders and potential offenders
- Children, adolescents, and teens
- Situations in which child sexual abuse is known to occur or has occurred
- Community approaches¹⁴

Education for youth is one opportunity of many for faith leaders to champion as they work to create safe spaces for all. Consider how different audiences are served when a community of faith takes initiative in hosting or coordinating prevention education messages at all levels of leadership. Offenders are shown that this is not a place where secrecy thrives. Youth are given safety tools in the context of a Creator who loves them, parents and caregivers are being supported by the community as they model important conversations, and with education the community is better equipped to provide healing to those who have been harmed.

Educate youth

In a summary of the research on personal safety education, David Finkelhor concludes the “weight of currently available evidence shows that it is worth providing children with high-quality prevention education programs.”¹⁵

There is power in speaking what has been often unspoken. One reason personal safety education may be effective is that offenders often use positions of power with children to facilitate and hide their abusive behavior and are able to make use of environments that value secrecy.¹⁶ When a faith community decides that children will be empowered with non-fear based, good quality information about body safety, it sends a message to all that children are valued here.

The United States Department of Education has recommended education for students as part of an overall program to prevent the abuse of children.¹⁷ Prevention education offered in the school typically provides developmentally appropriate information about personal safety in a general way and sexual abuse prevention in more of a specific way, including messages about seeking help

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html.

14. Stephen Smallbone, William L. Marshall, and Richard Wortley, *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: Evidence, Policy and Practice* (Cullompton, UK: Willan Publishing, 2008).

15. David Finkelhor, “Prevention of Sexual Abuse Through Educational Programs Directed Toward Children,” *Pediatrics*, 120(3) (2007), 640-645.

16. Joe Sullivan and Anthony Beech (2002) “Professional Perpetrators: Sex Offenders Who Use Their Employment to Target and Sexually Abuse the Children with Whom They Work,” *Child Abuse Review* 11 (2002), 153-167.

17. Carol Shakeshaft, *Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Synthesis of Existing Literature*, (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), 49.

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and emphasizing that children are not to blame for abuse.¹⁸ Faith communities are in a position to help provide proactive messages around prevention while also answering questions that may address spiritual injuries. It can be very powerful for a young person to hear from their faith leader that abuse is not their fault and that they are loved unconditionally. If the abuse is happening in the family, hearing from a respected faith leader that children have a right to be safe and have a right to get help can be a very powerful messaging to counteract the message they receive from their abuser.

It is important to consult a child abuse prevention expert when deciding which curriculum or course offering would be a good fit for your congregation or youth ministries. Well-intentioned adults can perpetuate ineffective programming by focusing on unreliable myths or outdated research. For example, “stranger danger” is not taught as an effective prevention tool as most people who harm children are known to them. Moreover, children may have an image in their mind of what a stranger looks like that is different from that of an adult. Children will often attach the danger message to the person coming out of the van in a trench coat but won’t attach the same concern to someone they meet at a family reunion. Again, the focus should be on behavior and not how we know a person. The messaging can be as simple as “If anyone asks you to go somewhere with them, I want you to check in with me first. It doesn’t matter who the person is or how we know them. Let’s practice with some what ifs...” Outcomes in various curriculums can vary. Programs with multiple outcome gains feature three main components: modeling, group discussion and role play.¹⁹

Faith communities are at an advantage in prevention planning as classes for parents can have a stronger buy-in than parent classes offered at school. Especially if offered after a worship experience, families are likely to be in the same place at the same time and each group can have prevention offerings. Lessons children learn from prevention programs usually last for several months and may last as long as one year.²⁰ When parents are equipped with prevention

18. Alan Carr, “Prevention of child sexual abuse,” in Alan Carr, ed. *Prevention: What works with Children and Adolescents? A Critical Review of Psychological Prevention Programmes for Children, Adolescents and their Families* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

19. Keith J. Topping and Ian G. Barron, “School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs: A Review of Effectiveness,” *Review of Educational Research* 79, (2009), 431-463.

20. Ibid.

information and scenarios to review with children, the important step of building on skills learned and increasing knowledge gains can be built throughout childhood.²¹ Information about having a Family Safety Night or “What If” scenarios can be accessed through the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center.²²

Program evaluation

Evaluating if the programs you are offering to families are effective is a very important step as your faith leaders make decisions about what is working and what to build upon. It is best practice to have programs and policies that evolve and improve.²³ Prevention programs require regular review and evaluation to be sure they are updated with research and knowledge that reflects the time.²⁴ Evaluation can also help ease fears for parents and open the door to more community partners. In one study, researchers reviewed data from twenty-four different school-based prevention programs. Children who had been taught prevention at school were more likely than those who did not receive the education to tell an adult if they had or were currently experiencing child sexual abuse.²⁵ That same research showed that children did not have adverse effects and there was little evidence to show that children experienced unnecessary worry from having prevention education offered to them.²⁶ Having data about the effectiveness of what is being offered can help as you adapt and adjust offerings to best serve your community.

Conclusion

Faith communities are in a powerful position to take on the responsibility of providing good quality prevention education as a way of living out the community’s beliefs in a real and concrete way.

It is truly an awesome responsibility to be involved in shaping the lives of children, families, and caring adults as faith communities create spaces where all are heard, respected, and protected. Offering prevention education for all members, including children and youth, is one big step forward in making the safety of all a priority.

It is truly an awesome responsibility to be involved in shaping the lives of children, families, and caring adults as faith communities create spaces where all are heard, respected, and protected. Offering prevention education for all members, including children and youth, is one big step forward in making the safety of all a priority. As adults take on ownership of prevention, consult with experts, engage children and youth, and evaluate what is working, the community becomes stronger in their ability to protect the least of these. The first steps may start from a place of discomfort, as most growth does. Reach out to your local sexual abuse prevention resources and Child Advocacy Centers so that decisions originate from the question, “What is best for the children we serve?” It is the very same question that Mary and Joseph asked and acted upon.

21. H. Martyniuk, Emily R. Dworkin, *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: Programs for Children* (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2011).

22. www.jwrc.org

23. Naeshia McDowell, *Georgia’s Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention Technical Assistance Resource Guide: Guidance for Schools and Youth-serving Organizations to Build Their Capacity for Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention* (Georgia Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force, 2017). Accessed December 22, 2017: <http://georgiacenterforchildadvocacy.org/learn-more/resources/child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-prevention-resource-guide.html>.

24. Ibid.

25. K. Walsh, K. Zwi, S. Woolfenden, A. Shlonsky. “School-based Education Programmes for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse.” *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2015, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD004380. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004380.pub3.

26. Ibid.

Coordinating Medical and Pastoral Care in Cases of Child Abuse and Neglect

Victor I. Vieth¹

Introduction

There is a significant body of research documenting the impact of child maltreatment on physical and emotional health.² There is also a growing body of research documenting the impact of child maltreatment on spirituality.³ In this article, readers receive a brief overview of the research on the intersection between religion and health in cases of child maltreatment as well as suggestions for coordinating medical care with spiritual care. Using corporal punishment as an example, there is also a discussion of the possibility of collaboration when faith and medicine are in conflict.

The intersection between medicine and religion

Throughout history, religious communities have played a significant role in the creation of hospitals.⁴ In the United States today, religious communities continue to support more than one out of ten of the nation's hospitals.⁵ Indeed, the traditional medical symbol of a snake wrapped around a pole reflects an account from the Hebrew Bible.⁶ Apart from these historic links, there has been a long-standing belief by many medical providers that spirituality and health are interconnected.⁷ This belief is reflected in the fact that 90 percent of medical schools in the United States

There has been a long-standing belief by many medical providers that spirituality and health are interconnected.

have courses or at least course content exploring the relationship between health and spirituality.⁸

Religion, health, and child abuse: an overview of the research

There are a number of studies finding that religious involvement can serve as a source of resilience that protects against the potential impact of child abuse on medical or mental health.⁹ However, these studies have several limitations including small sample sizes and a focus primarily on female survivors of sexual abuse.

To correct for these limitations, Reinert and colleagues did a large study that assessed the impact of multiple forms of child abuse on medical and mental health as well as the role of religious involvement in mitigating these impacts. Reinert queried 10,283 men and women identifying as Seventh Day Adventists, on the experience of five types of early childhood trauma: sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and witnessing family violence.¹⁰ Sixty-seven percent of the participants endured mal-

1. Senior Director and Founder of the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center and President of the Academy on Violence and Abuse. The author is grateful to doctors Randy Alexander, Ann Budzak-Garza, and Dave Corwin for their careful review and helpful comments on early drafts of this article.

2. Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, "The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare," in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, eds. Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, and Clare Pain (Cambridge Medicine, 2010), 77.

3. Donald F. Walker, et al., "Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents," *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice* 41 (2010): 174.

4. Paul A. Offit, *Bad Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 119–120.

5. *Ibid.*, 120.

6. Num 21:8–9.

7. Harold Koenig, Dana King, and Verna B. Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health Second Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

8. Harold G. Koenig, Elizabeth G. Hooten, Erin Lindsay-Calkins, and Keith G. Meador, "Spirituality in Medical School Curricula: Findings from a National Survey," *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 40(4) (2010): 391–397.

9. Terry Lynn Gall, "Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 30 (2006): 829–844; Terry Lynn Gall, Viola Basque, Marizette Damasceno-Scott, and Gerard Vardy, "Spirituality and the Current Adjustment of Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46 (2007): 101–117; Jungmeen Kim, "The Protective Effects of Religiosity on Maladjustment Among Maltreated and Nonmaltreated Children," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 32 (2008): 711–720.

10. Katie G. Reinhert, Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Karen Bandeen-Roche, Jerry W. Less, and Sarah Szanton, "The Role of Religious Involvement in the Relationship Between Early Trauma and Health Outcomes Among Adult Survivors," *Journal of Child & Adolescent*

treatment in at least one of the categories, 9 percent were abused in at least three categories, and 5 percent were abused in all five categories.¹¹ Reinert documented a reduction in the medical and mental health of participants abused in at least one of the categories with a “greater reduction in mental health” for those with higher exposures to trauma and “more than twice a reduction in physical health” for higher exposures.¹²

However, the negative impact of child abuse was moderated by some types of religious involvement. Specifically, the negative impact of child abuse on mental health was reduced by the following:

- Positive religious coping mechanisms (e.g., “I tried to make sense of the situation with God’s help.”)
- Intrinsic religiosity (e.g., private prayer, study, church attendance)
- Forgiveness (e.g., “I have forgiven those who hurt me.”)
- Gratitude (e.g., “I have so much in life to be thankful for.”)

Negative religious coping (e.g., “God is punishing me.”) did not moderate the mental health impact of child abuse nor did it “significantly exacerbate the association of [child maltreatment] with worse mental health.”¹³ Reinert speculates the reason negative religious coping did not have a greater detrimental impact on mental health is because this form of coping was very low in the sample studied.¹⁴

With respect to medical health, Reinert found “no strong evidence” that religious involvement moderated the impact of child abuse and neglect, but noted that forgiveness was very close to having a statistically significant impact on medical health.¹⁵ According to Reinert, a “very likely explanation” for this limited effect is the “overall good health” of the population studied, reflecting the strong emphasis in the Seventh Day Adventist faith community of healthy behaviors such as proper nutrition and exercise, and the infrequent use of behaviors adverse to health such as smoking, alcohol or drug use.¹⁶ If this is true, then religious involvement may have a greater impact on medical health in other faith traditions with less insistence on healthy behaviors.

Implications for medical and pastoral care providers

There are at least five implications from this research for medical and pastoral care providers:

1. Hospitals and clinics may want to explore the integration of quality spiritual care into the health care treatment of child and adult survivors of abuse.

Trauma 9 (2016): 231–241.

11. *Ibid.*, 235.
 12. *Ibid.*, 236.
 13. *Ibid.*, 237.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Ibid.*, 238.
 16. *Ibid.*

There is a “silent revolution for creating more compassionate systems of care through the full integration of spirituality into health care.”

Since 2002, the percentage of hospitals providing spiritual care services has increased from 53 to 70 percent.¹⁷ According to a group of international experts who gathered to discuss this issue, there is a “silent revolution for creating more compassionate systems of care through the full integration of spirituality into health care.”¹⁸ At the same time the experts recommended clear guidelines for spiritual care in a health care setting, rigorous education, and strong research to support this work.¹⁹

In a similar vein, hospitals providing spiritual care to child or adult survivors of maltreatment should develop guidelines for how this will be done, should make sure spiritual care providers are trained on working with survivors of maltreatment,²⁰ and should research the efficacy of any spiritual care services offered or provided to survivors of abuse.

2. Hospitals and clinics, perhaps in concert with Children’s Advocacy Centers, may want to develop a process for recommending ongoing pastoral care services to survivors of abuse.

In 2017, Tishelman and Fontes published a study noting the “positive aspects of religion” for many survivors of abuse but also noting that some religious tenets and religious leaders can be harmful to maltreated children.²¹ Accordingly, while it may be critical to some survivors to receive ongoing pastoral care, it is also critical to ensure the survivor receives competent pastoral care. To this end, medical providers and child protection professionals should, at a minimum, inquire of the capabilities of local clergy to provide pastoral care in cases of child abuse and also their willingness to coordinate that care with appropriate medical and mental health care.

In making this inquiry, the following questions may be helpful:

- What, if any, training on child maltreatment did you have at

17. Stacy Weiner, “Is there a Chaplain in the House? Hospitals Integrate Spiritual Care,” *AAMC News*, November 21, 2017.

18. Christina M. Puchalski, Robert Vitillo, Sharon K. Hull, and Nancy Reiller, “Improving the Spiritual Dimension of Whole Person Care: Reaching National and International Consensus,” *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 17 (2014): 642–656.

19. *Ibid.*

20. As one example, Gundersen Health System provides a rigorous three-day course, titled *Chaplains for Children*, for faith leaders interested in working with children or adults impacted by abuse.

21. Amy C. Tishelman and Lisa A. Fontes, “Religion in Child Sexual Abuse Interviews,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 63 (2017): 120–130.

seminary or in another setting?

- What, if any, training on child abuse have you had since you graduated seminary?
- What, if any, child protection policies does your church/synagogue/temple have? Do these policies address all forms of child abuse?
- Have you ever delivered a sermon or conducted a Bible study on child maltreatment?
- What, if any, child abuse training do you require of staff working with children?
- What is your familiarity with basic research on the impact of child abuse (e.g., Adverse Childhood Experience/ACE research, etc.)?²²
- What experience have you had in working with an abused child or adult survivor of abuse?
- Are you familiar with the concept of “poly-victimization”?²³
- What is your approach for coordinating pastoral care with medical and mental health care?²⁴
- Are you theologically opposed to medications for any mental health conditions a child may have?
- Are you theologically opposed to mental health counseling?
- Are you theologically opposed to medical care for maltreated children?
- What are your views of corporal punishment? (Some survivors of physical abuse struggle with any church that still urges parents and other adults to hit children).²⁵

As a result of this inquiry, a community is likely to discover that it has very few clergy with seminary or other training on child maltreatment. If this is the case, the community can explore op-

22. Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, & Clare Pain, eds. (Cambridge Medicine, 2010), 77.

23. Many children who are abused in one way, such as physical abuse, are abused in other ways, such as sexual abuse or emotional abuse. This concept is called “poly-victimization.” This concept is important because we know from research that children violated in multiple ways often suffer greater medical and mental health problems. Heather A. Turner, David Finkelhor, and Richard Omrod, “Poly-Victimization in a National Sample of Children and Youth,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 38: (2010): 323–330.

24. The American Psychiatric Association has published a helpful guide to assist faith leaders in working with medical and mental health care providers in addressing mental illness: American Psychiatric Association Foundation, *Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders* (American Psychiatric Association Foundation: Arlington, Va., 2016).

25. Victor I. Vieth, “Augustine, Luther and Solomon: Providing Pastoral Guidance to Parents on the Corporal Punishment of Children,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44.3 (2017): 25-33.

While it may be critical to some survivors to receive ongoing pastoral care, it is also critical to ensure the survivor receives competent pastoral care. To this end, medical providers and child protection professionals should, at a minimum, inquire of the capabilities of local clergy to provide pastoral care in cases of child abuse and also their willingness to coordinate that care with appropriate medical and mental health care.

tions for growing a base of clergy qualified to work in this area. As one example, the Children’s Advocacy Center in Greenville, South Carolina, hired a full-time chaplain with specialized training in responding to child maltreatment.²⁶ In turn, this chaplain works with the area clergy in providing training and other assistance in growing the knowledge and skills of faith leaders in the community.

3. When making mental health referrals for someone who has experienced abuse and who is indicating faith is important, medical and pastoral care providers should look for mental health counselors utilizing evidence-based treatment and who are fluent in the research on the intersection between health and spirituality.

Although it is essential to refer victims of abuse to counselors trained and skilled in utilizing treatment models supported by research, it is also possible to utilize these models to address spiritual questions a survivor may be struggling with.²⁷ To this end, the American Psychological Association has published two treatises to assist clinicians.²⁸

26. “Julie Valentine Center becomes the First Child Advocacy Center in the U.S. to add Chaplain to Its Staff,” *GSA Business Report*, January 17, 2017, available at: <http://gsabizwire.com/julie-valentine-center-becomes-the-first-child-advocacy-center-in-the-us-to-add-chaplain-to-its-staff/> (last accessed January 2, 2018).

27. Terri S. Watson, “Counseling the Abuse Victim: Integrating Evidence-based Practice Guidelines with Spiritual Resources,” in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused*, Andrew J. Schmutzter, ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock 2011), 248–249.

28. Donald E. Walker and William L. Hathaway, *Spiritual Interventions in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2013); Donald F. Walker, Chris-

4. When making a medical referral for a child or adult impacted by abuse, clergy should proactively seek a medical provider trained and skilled in responding to trauma and who is sympathetic to the client's desire to use his or her faith as a means of coping.

Just as not every member of the clergy is qualified to work with a survivor of child maltreatment, not every doctor is qualified. A pastor, for example, may be working with a survivor who has multiple health conditions that could be related to the trauma—such as sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression. When this happens, the pastor may be tempted to urge his or her client to discuss a history of trauma with the client's medical provider. Before making this recommendation, it is important to make sure the medical provider knows something about responding to trauma and its influence on health.

If a pastor is unsure whether a particular doctor is skilled in working with patients who have suffered child maltreatment, a local children's advocacy center may be able to assist the pastor in finding area medical providers who are trauma-informed; any hospital affiliated with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network²⁹ is also likely able to provide guidance. At a minimum, a pastor can advise a victim to ask some questions about a doctor's familiarity with the impact of abuse on health and, if he or she is not familiar with this research, making an appropriate referral.

5. Medical and pastoral care workers need to collaborate in instances where faith and medicine collide.

There are myriad instances in which faith and medicine may be in conflict; when this happens, the ability to help a survivor of abuse or to prevent abuse may depend on the ability of doctors and clergy to collaborate.

As one example, there is a growing body of research that corporal punishment is an ineffective form of discipline and elevates the risk for poor medical and mental health outcomes.³⁰ As a result, pediatricians are increasingly discouraging parents from employing a practice that research shows to be detrimental to a child's health.³¹ Unfortunately, many conservative Protestant parents believe the Bible requires them to employ corporal punishment and will not yield to health care providers on this issue unless they are given a sound theological reason to do so.³² How-

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tine A. Courtois, and Jamie D. Aten, *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy for Trauma* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2015).

29. For additional information about the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, visit their website at: <http://www.nctsn.org/> (last accessed January 2, 2018).

30. Elizabeth T. Gershoff and Andrew Grogran-Kaylor, "Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Family Psychology* 30 (2016): 453–469.

31. Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, "Guidance for Effective Discipline," *Pediatrics* 723 (1998): 101.

32. Victor I. Vieth, "From Sticks to Flowers: Guidelines for Child Protection Professionals Working with Parents Using Scripture

It is critical to have in place appropriate guidelines and to ensure that medical and pastoral care providers are trained in working with victims of child abuse and that each discipline respects the role of the other.

ever, when conservative Protestants are presented with a plausible theological argument for not physically disciplining children,³³ the attitudes of many begin to change and they are much more open to considering research documenting the physical and emotional risks of hitting children as a means of discipline.³⁴

This promising research on changing the attitudes of conservative Protestants on corporal punishment suggests it may be possible for doctors and theologians to find common ground even when the respective disciplines come into conflict.

Conclusion

There is research documenting the importance of spiritual care for many patients, with an emerging sub-set of research documenting the importance of spiritual care for children and adults who have been victims of child abuse or neglect. As we move in this direction, it is critical to have in place appropriate guidelines and to ensure that medical and pastoral care providers are trained in working with victims of child abuse and that each discipline respects the role of the other. In cases of child maltreatment in which faith and medicine sometimes are in conflict, the importance of collaboration may be particularly important.

to Justify Corporal Punishment," *William Mitchell Law Review* 40 (2014): 907–942; John P. Hoffmann, Christopher G. Ellison, and John P. Bartkowski, "Conservative Protestantism and Attitudes Toward Corporal Punishment, 1986 to 2014 63 *Social Science Research* (2017): 81–94.

33. See e.g., Victor I. Vieth, "Augustine, Luther and Solomon: Providing Pastoral Guidance to Parents on the Corporal Punishment of Children," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44.3 (2017): 25–33.

34. Robin Perrin, Cindy Miller-Perrin, and Jeongbin Song, "Changing Attitudes About Spanking Using Alternative Biblical Interpretations," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 41 (2017): 514–522; Cindy Miller-Perrin and Robin Perrin, "Changing Attitudes About Spanking Among Conservative Christians Using Interventions that Focus on Empirical Research Evidence and Progressive Biblical Interpretations," DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.03.015

Coordinating Pastoral Care of Survivors with Mental Health Providers

Pete Singer¹

Witnessing and experiencing abuse as a child significantly increases the risk that the child will demonstrate emotional and behavioral concerns later in childhood or as an adult.² For centuries, concerns such as these were considered spiritual issues to be addressed exclusively within the Church.³ The past fifty years has seen a dramatic shift in this view, and both the Church and mental health providers have a growing awareness of the benefit that each can bring to a person's overall health and functioning, especially if there is a history of abuse or trauma.⁴

A brief history

Emotional and behavioral concerns, now often referred to as mental health needs, have existed since the beginning of recorded history. In multiple passages, the Bible indicates a relationship, though not always direct causality, between sin and emotional/behavioral concerns,⁵ even if the sin is on the part of someone other than the person bearing the consequence of the sin. Seeing this connection, most of Christianity either addressed emotional/behavioral concerns within the Church or severed connection with the person. While this proved adequate for some, others were not

As the faith community and mental health system learned more accurate information about each other, they developed a growing awareness of the need to collaborate.

sufficiently helped.

As society moved away from a more Christian-centered perspective, recognition grew that many needs were not being met. Psychology and related mental health fields emerged, partially in response to this unmet need. As they did so, Sigmund Freud's militant atheism, as well as approaches such as strict behaviorism and exclusively cognitive or biological views of human behavior and existence, contributed to deep divides, mistrust, and hostility between the mental health field and the Church.⁶

As the twentieth century unfolded, views gradually changed within both communities. Maslow introduced a hierarchy of needs that recognized spirituality as a central piece of a person's being.⁷ Mental health service delivery decentralized, and the emergence of community-based interventions drastically increased the contact the Church had with individuals with emotional/behavioral or mental health needs.⁸ As the faith community and mental health system learned more accurate information about each other, they developed a growing awareness of the need to collaborate. Reservations remain,⁹ and systems for referral and collaboration are still lacking,¹⁰ but most faith leaders and mental health providers now

1. Pete Singer, MSW, LICSW, is the Founding Director of Care in Action Minnesota, which has helped the faith community respond to and prevent child maltreatment since 2005. He consults across disciplines on trauma-informed practice and is a clinical social worker focusing on childhood trauma.

2. Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, "The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare," in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, eds. Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, and Clare Pain, (Cambridge Medicine, 2010), 77.

3. Clark S. Aist, "A conception of the interface connecting faith and mental health" (2015), [https://www.psychiatry.org/File Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-clark.pdf](https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-clark.pdf).

4. Katherine J. Partridge and Donald F. Walker, "Addressing Spiritual Struggles Using Spiritually Oriented Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: An International Case Study," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 34 (2015), 84–90.

5. Examples include a) Genesis 3, as Adam and Eve's sin leads to emotional disturbance (fear, guilt, anxiety) and more sin (lying, blaming); b) 2 Samuel 11–12, as David's sin against Bathsheba leads to his murder of Uriah, and the baby born after David's sin suffers and dies; and c) Romans 1, as Paul describes the perpetuation and growth of sin within a person or community.

6. John Peteet, "The interface between religion/spirituality and mental health," (2015), [https://www.psychiatry.org/File Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-peteet.pdf](https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-peteet.pdf).

7. Robin Powers, "Counseling and Spirituality: A Historical Perspective," *Counseling and Values* 49 (2005): 217–225.

8. Aist, "A conception of the interface connecting faith and mental health" (2015).

9. "Why do pastors and churches recommend psychotherapy?" (2008), https://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/recommend_psychotherapy.html

10. Peteet, "The interface between religion/spirituality and mental

accept the need and benefit of collaboration.¹¹

Options for coordinating care

Faith communities have several options for coordinating with mental health providers to deliver care for people who have experienced maltreatment. Most options fall into either a more community-oriented approach or a more individual-oriented approach. The Church provides the best care and nurturing of her members when she pursues both avenues.

The Church already uses multiple community-based interventions. These include prevention efforts,¹² community healing events,¹³ support groups,¹⁴ and cross training.¹⁵ The community and issue-related focus of these efforts often feels more palatable to faith leaders and mental health practitioners alike, and this can lay the groundwork for more individualized collaboration.¹⁶

Individual efforts to coordinate spiritual and mental health care tend to give people in both arenas more pause than community efforts. Vestiges of the historic mistrust between these fields emerge, and people wonder if collaboration is an admission of inadequacy.¹⁷ Viewing this partnership as cooperative with defined roles, rather than an abdication of authority and expertise, can

health,” (2015).

11. In the article “Counseling and Spirituality: A Historical Perspective,” Powers searched for psychological and pastoral articles, books, and chapters that referenced “counseling” and “spirituality” together. Powers found a clear increase over time for the frequency of these terms appearing together: 1930-39, 3; 1940-49, 4; 1950-59, 19; 1960-69, 11; 1970-79, 112; 1980-84, 119; 1985-89, 256; 1990-94, 412; 1995-99, 433; 2000-04, 531. Robin Powers, “Counseling and Spirituality: A Historical Perspective,” *Counseling and Values*, 49 (2005), 217–225.

12. For example, Shared Hope International has done significant work to prevent human trafficking. See more at <https://sharedhope.org/>.

13. For example, Ebenezer Baptist Church and many other congregations continue holding “community healing services” following the violence in Charleston, S.C. See more at <http://www.ebenzerameonline.org/>.

14. For example, Eagle Brook Church, a multi-campus congregation in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota, facilitates faith-based 12-step addiction recovery groups called Quest 180. See more at <https://eaglebrookchurch.com/next-steps/find-support/addiction--recovery/>.

15. For example, Bethel Seminary in Minnesota has a Marriage and Family Therapy Program (<https://www.bethel.edu/seminary/academics/marriage-family-therapy/>); The National Child Protection Training Center, a program of Gundersen Health System, has presented a conference titled “Chaplains for Children” that aims to equip clergy to respond to and prevent child maltreatment (<http://www.gundersenhealth.org/ncptc/trainings-education/chaplains-for-children/>); and the American Psychiatric Association has developed training around their “Quick Reference on Mental Health for Faith Leaders” pamphlet (<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/faith-community-partnership/>).

16. Kathryn M. Benes, Joseph M. Walsh, J.M., Mark R. McMinn, Amy W. Dominguez, and Daniel C. Aikins, (2000). “Psychology and the Church: An Exemplar of Psychologist-Clergy Collaboration,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 31 (2000): 515–520.

17. Peteet, “The interface between religion/spirituality and mental health,” (2015).

Experiencing abuse takes an incredible toll on the whole person. Because of this, spiritual and mental health care are often both indispensable.

ease both of these concerns.

Consultation and referral are the primary individual-centered ways to coordinate pastoral and mental health care.¹⁸ Consultation is most beneficial as a two-way relationship in which a mental health provider seeks input on the relationship between a faith system and the emotional/behavioral issues being addressed in counseling, and a pastor seeks input on how mental health may impact a person’s spiritual journey.¹⁹ While this type of relationship is often centered around specific people, names are generally not shared, and a referral is often not made.

Reasons for referral

Making a referral is significantly more involved than consultation. Experiencing abuse takes an incredible toll on the whole person. Because of this, spiritual and mental health care are often both indispensable. The Survivor or their family often realize this and seek help. When they do, more than 50 percent turn to a faith leader before they approach anyone else,²⁰ prompting many mental health publications to refer to faith leaders as front-line mental health workers.²¹ This places a huge responsibility on pastors to know their capacity, based both on the level of need and the sheer volume of people who have experienced abuse or have other counseling needs.²² When that capacity is stretched, or when other needs arise, referral to a mental health provider may be the best way to care for the Survivor. Such a referral is often beneficial, and in many situations, necessary.

18. Craig Rennobohm, “A call to healing,” (2014) retrieved from [https://www.psychiatry.org/File Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-rennobohm.pdf](https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-rennobohm.pdf)

19. For example, an area church recently contacted this therapist when a young girl revealed she had been sexually abused by a family member. No identifying information was exchanged, but the pastor who called was able to develop a trauma-informed approach for addressing the situation, and the pastor later called to say that the situation appeared to have a good resolution. In another example, an area therapist relates the story of seeing a client diagnosed with Autism and Gender Dysphoria, who revealed to his family that he is transgender. The client attends an Evangelical church and youth group. At the client’s request, the therapist and youth pastor consulted, which allowed both to better meet the needs of this teen.

20. Aist, “A conception of the interface connecting faith and mental health” (2015).

21. Julia E. Oppenheimer, Kevin J. Flannelly, and Andrew J. Weaver, “A Comparative Analysis of the Psychological Literature on Collaboration Between Clergy and Mental Health Professionals—Perspectives from Secular and Religious Journals: 1970–1999,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 53 (2004): 153–162.

22. Rennobohm, “A call to healing,” (2014).

Several factors influence the choice to refer a person in the Church to a mental health provider,²³ including the person's level of distress. Every person responds to trauma in their own unique way. For some, the level of distress may be relatively low, especially if they have loving support and the abuse was an isolated experience. Others may encounter intense distress and seem inconsolable. They know they need to work through the abuse, but the very mention of it sends them into a downward spiral that reason seems unable to interrupt. Still others seem on the surface to have little distress, but, in reality, have entered a dissociative state that separates their awareness from the trauma. The more intense the distress, and the more pervasive the dissociation, the more essential it is to make a referral to a mental health provider.

The person's level of functioning also determines the importance of making a referral. Many people are able to contain the effects of the trauma, using both healthy and unhealthy means. Those who do may have little noticeable impact on their functioning at home, work, school, or other areas of their lives. If this compartmentalization occurs without making some sense of the trauma, or if the trauma overwhelms the person's ability to contain it, functioning eventually suffers. Children develop defiant behavior. Parents become harsh or absent. Marriages dissolve. People lose their jobs or see work and school performance plummet. They withdraw from relationships. They may abuse someone else. As the intensity of these functional impacts increases, the urgency of a referral also rises.

The most extreme consequence for Survivors is future harm to self or others. This includes suicide risk. For every age group in the United States from ten to fifty-four years of age, suicide is between the second and fourth leading cause of death.²⁴ Other forms of self-harm, such as cutting and burning, are on the rise. The frequency of verbal and physical assaults also increases for those who have been abused,²⁵ with Survivors of childhood abuse from two to seven times more likely to be arrested for violent crime as adults.²⁶ The more specific and realistic a person's comments about harming self or others, the more likely that they will follow through. No other factor increases the urgency of referral more than the risk of harm to self or others.

Some factors that indicate the need for referral relate to the pastor, rather than the person who is seeking help. Counseling someone

If the trauma overwhelms the person's ability to contain it, functioning eventually suffers.

who was abused by another person in the same congregation may raise ethical concerns and cloud the pastor's judgment. The pastor may struggle to relate to the experiences of the Survivor, or they may relate too much if they have also been impacted by abuse. The particular areas of struggle may be outside the pastor's areas of competence or may involve both a spiritual and clearly psychiatric component. Time may limit capacity, as over 25 percent of people meet criteria for at least one mental health disorder, and at least 50 percent of people who have diagnosed mental health disorders have at some point used pastoral counseling.²⁷ Pastors may simply not have the ability to see that many people, especially if there has been systematic or institutional abuse in the area.

Strategies for referral

Deciding to refer someone to a mental health provider is the first step. Finding a way to effectively make the referral is the often-confusing next step, but several actions can greatly reduce this uncertainty:²⁸

Develop a list of trusted mental health providers to whom you feel comfortable making a referral. While some areas have few available, others have over 100 within ten miles.²⁹ Not all providers know how to work with trauma, and not all understand how a person's faith interacts with their mental health and the way they process the abuse. Developing this list may require calling providers and interviewing them, or reaching out to other pastors and faith leaders in the area to see if they have providers to whom they usually refer. Many communities have Children's Advocacy Centers,³⁰ and they can be an invaluable resource for consultation and referral options. It takes work, but developing this list allows a pastor to confidently choose a mental health provider or agency. In some situations, other members of the church staff may be able to help with this step.

23. American Psychiatric Association Foundation, *Quick Reference on Mental Health for Faith Leaders* (American Psychiatric Association Foundation: Arlington, Va., 2016), <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/faith-community-partnership>.

24. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *10 Leading Causes of Death by Age Group, United States – 2010*. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Atlanta, Ga., 2010), https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/10lcid_all_deaths_by_age_group_2010-a.pdf.

25. Margaret C. Cutajar, James Ogloff, and Paul E. Mullen *Child Sexual Abuse and Subsequent Offending and Victimization: A 45-Year Follow-Up Study*. (Canberra, Australia: Criminology Research Council, 2011) <http://www.crg.aic.gov.au/reports/0910-13.pdf>.

26. Janet Currie and Erdal Tekin, *Does Child Abuse Cause Crime?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12171.pdf>.

27. Oppenheimer et al., "A Comparative Analysis of the Psychological Literature on Collaboration Between Clergy and Mental Health Professionals" (2004), 153–162.

28. American Psychiatric Association Foundation, *Quick Reference on Mental Health for Faith Leaders* (2016).

29. While in a suburban neighborhood of St. Paul, Minn., the author used the resource search engine www.minnesotahelp.info to search for "individual therapy." The search revealed ninety-two providers within ten miles. The same search for a rural town in Minnesota revealed two providers within ten miles.

30. The National Children's Advocacy Center states on their website (<http://www.nationalcac.org/>) that there are over 1,000 Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) in the United States. The website has a helpful tool to locate CACs by location.

Communicate clearly to the Survivor that this is a need. If the Survivor believes the pastor sees it as unimportant or doubts the efficacy of mental health supports, that person will likely not follow through on getting the needed help. Even if the Survivor does follow through, effectiveness could be limited by the doubt the pastor sowed. During this phase, the pastor may indicate the importance of the referral by offering the church's help to cover some of the costs of therapy.

Make the referral a collaborative process. The Survivor may have tried therapy before or have preferences regarding the mental health provider's gender, location, age, or style. They may also want control of the information that is shared. Discussing these and other aspects of the referral ahead of time with the Survivor, or making the referral with the Survivor, can greatly increase their involvement and connection with the mental health provider.

Reassure the person that you will accompany them through the process.³¹ This unfolds differently in each situation. For some, it includes praying they connect with the mental health provider and then occasionally checking in. For others, it involves talking with the provider or offering to attend some appointments. For many, it involves integration or reintegration into church or community life, or helping them access additional supports. Regardless of how it unfolds, this is an excellent opportunity to truly *pastor* the Survivor.

Be clear about the difference between spiritual care and professional mental health care. Boundaries can be fuzzy for everyone in this process, but having a proactive conversation with the mental health provider and the Survivor can remove some of the guess work. The process begins by simply acknowledging that a pastor and mental health provider have different roles.

Respect confidentiality and privacy. This is especially true when the person is dealing with such personal things as abuse; it impacts both the information the pastor shares and what they expect to receive. Using a release of information form that specifies ahead of time what information can be shared is a wise step that can avoid misunderstanding and damaged trust. Even with a release in place, it is good to occasionally confirm what information the person wants shared.

He promised to walk through this journey with her or to find another spiritual mentor with whom she felt more comfortable.

Putting these strategies into motion: a case scenario

In order to get a sense of how these strategies or steps may play out, consider the following hypothetical case scenario. Pastor John was new to the area. He had been a pastor in another state for five years before receiving a call to his new congregation. The small-town church seemed welcoming, and he developed trusting relationships in the congregation. The town was slower to accept him, but the church's history of outreach opened doors, and he began to feel at home after a year.

As he got to know the community, Pastor John contacted area businesses and churches. He asked other pastors whether they referred people to mental health professionals. Most did not, but a couple said they sent people to see Ann, a therapist in the next town. Pastor John called and spoke with Ann, and he felt satisfied that he could refer both children and adults to her if needed. Ann told him about a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) in a town about 25 miles away, so he called them. They assured him that Ann was a good therapist, and they gave him the names of two others within 45 minutes. Pastor John called them. While they were further away, he felt he could use them if needed.

Mary was a long-standing member of the congregation. Pastor John was surprised when he received an urgent call from her asking to meet. They met later that day, and Mary burst into tears as she poured out her heart. Mary had hidden a history of abuse since she was a child, but for some reason she felt like she was experiencing it all over again. She felt disconnected from her husband and daughter, and she dreaded physical and emotional intimacy. She couldn't sleep at night or focus during the day. She had intense bouts of overwhelming sadness a few times each week. She had received a warning at work. She felt bitterness toward God for allowing this to happen to her as a child and not healing her pain now. That morning had been a period of intense sadness, and she had briefly considered suicide. Though she had no intent and no concrete plan, she panicked that she would entertain such a thought, and that had prompted her call to Pastor John.

Pastor John offered comfort. He assured her that she was not to blame for the abuse. He promised to walk through this journey with her or to find another spiritual mentor with whom she felt more comfortable. He gently explained that abuse has a spiritual impact as well as an emotional impact that may require specialized help. He told her about Ann and his confidence in her, and he urged Mary to meet with her. Mary was reluctant, offering several reasons not to, including cost and fear that others would find out.

31. This can be very demanding, especially if multiple people are seeking help. Pastors and other shepherds within the congregation may benefit from accessing ministries and supports such as Stephen Ministries (<http://stephenministries.org>) or Tree house (<https://www.treehouseyouth.org>).

Pastor John was careful to not become too forceful or directive. He promised to keep the matter confidential and offered to have the congregation defray much of the initial cost. He assured her that it was her choice, but that he would be happy to make the call with her and to support her through the process. He said she could talk to both Ann and him. He briefly explained that he and Ann had different roles, leaving a further explanation for later.

Throughout the conversation, Pastor John followed Mary's lead. He was caring and assuring, balancing the need to simply be with her in the pain and to help her find a way forward. After considering what Pastor John said, Mary decided to see Ann. She asked Pastor John to help her. After clarifying what she wanted him to say, he left Ann a message. Mary assured Pastor John that she was no longer considering self-harm, and she said their conversation had helped. She felt hope that she could make it through. Before Mary left, Pastor John prayed with her. He also wrote down what she wanted him to say to Ann and asked her to approve it. He scheduled a time to meet with her the following day. Pastor John continued helping Mary for over a year, consulting with Ann as Mary wished. He even attended an appointment with her when Mary asked. Much healing remained, but it had started because Pastor John was prepared.

Conclusion

Child maltreatment produces pervasive emotional, behavioral, and spiritual ramifications in the lives of those affected by it. The extent of the impact and the prevalence of the problem make it essential to develop a collaborative strategy that allows faith leaders to effectively coordinate pastoral and mental health care. Knowing ways to collaborate, understanding factors that increase the urgency of collaboration, and having a concrete plan in place all provide a pastor with the necessary tools to coordinate pastoral care of Survivors with mental health providers.

The extent of the impact and the prevalence of the problem make it essential to develop a collaborative strategy that allows faith leaders to effectively coordinate pastoral and mental health care.

Understanding and Working with Adult Sex Offenders in the Church

Cory Jewell Jensen¹

Introduction: the prevalence of sex offenders

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, approximately one out of every 370 people in the United States is a convicted, registered sex offender.² Take into account the fact that females only account for 2 percent of those on public registries for sex offenses and, with a fairly small error rate, one could estimate that roughly one in 185 males are registered sex offenders.³ Further consider the fact that very few children (5 to 13 percent) disclose when they are being sexually abused and the reality of how many people commit sexual crimes but are never reported, let alone arrested, convicted, or registered becomes more clear.⁴ Follow the equation one more step and you will conclude that the offenders you are aware of are only a drop in the bucket compared to those who sit secretly in your pews with hymnals in their laps.

Understanding the complexities involved in child sexual abuse and sex offender behavior (i.e., the prevalence, etiology, grooming and treatment/risk management strategies) can go a long way in helping religious institutions become better equipped to safeguard children, fulfill their missions and help offenders avoid putting their own lives and souls at further risk. Although this article cannot address all of the complexities involved, it can serve as an introduction and a guide for obtaining additional resources.

The etiology of child sexual abuse

Sex offenders come in all races/ethnic groups, religions, occupations, genders and age groups. In terms of the etiology or cause

Understanding the complexities involved in child sexual abuse and sex offender behavior (i.e., the prevalence, etiology, grooming and treatment/risk management strategies) can go a long way in helping religious institutions become better equipped to safeguard children, fulfill their missions and help offenders avoid putting their own lives and souls at further risk.

of sexually abusing children, “there is no simple answer as to why people engage in this behavior.”⁵ Although sexual abuse is a learned behavior, numerous factors may contribute.⁶ Early exposure to aggressive pornographic material may play a role.⁷ Many offenders report having endured various forms of child abuse and neglect themselves.⁸ Contrary to previous beliefs, some experts report that child physical abuse and neglect may play a greater role than child sexual abuse in contributing to sexual offenses.⁹

1. Cory Jewell Jensen M.S., CCSOT, is a sex offender treatment provider who currently works for CBI Consulting, Inc. as a trainer and consultant on Child Abuse Prevention, and Sex Offender Behavior and Risk Management.

2. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, “Map of Registered Sex Offenders, available online at: http://www.missingkids.com/content/dam/ncmec/en_us/documents/sexoffendersmap2015.pdf (last viewed November 10, 2017).

3. Alissa R. Ackerman, Andrew J. Harris, Jill S. Levenson, and Kristen Zgoba, “Who are the People in Your Neighborhood? A Descriptive Analysis of Individuals on Public Sex Offender Registries,” *International Journal of Psychiatry and Law* 34 (2011): 149–159.

4. Kamala London, Daniel B Wright, Maggie Bruck, and Stephen Ceci, “Review of the Contemporary Literature on How Children Report Sexual Abuse to Others: Findings, Methodological Issues, and Implications for Forensic Interviews,” *Memory* 16 (2008): 29–47.

5. Susan Faupel, “Etiology of Adult Sexual Offending,” in *Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative* (United States Department of Justice SMART Office 2018), available online at: https://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/sec1/ch2_etiology.html (last visited March 27, 2018).

6. Ibid.

7. W.L. Marshall, “The Use of Sexually Explicit Stimuli by Rapists, Child Molesters, and Nonoffenders,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 25 (1988): 267–288.

8. Jill S. Levenson, Gwenda M. Willis and David S. Prescott, “Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Lives of Male Sex Offenders: Implications for Trauma-Informed Care,” *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 25 (2014): 340–359.

9. Cathy Spatz Widom and Christina Massey, “A Prospective Examination of Whether Childhood Sexual Abuse Predicts Subsequent Sexual Offending,” *JAMA Pediatrics* 169 (2015), available online at: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2086458>

One of the challenges in assessing etiology is that sex offenders are manipulative and often lie about their histories. In fact, one study indicated that half of the offenders who initially told people they'd been sexually abused as children later acknowledged they'd lied in order to appear less culpable for their crimes. In the end, only 30 percent maintained that they had been sexually abused while nearly 70 percent reported that they started molesting children as a youth.¹⁰

Given the complexities of etiology, clergy are cautioned not to overstep their bounds and assume they know the factors contributing to sexual abuse in a particular case. Instead, pastors should encourage offenders to obtain as complete an assessment as possible and should coordinate any ongoing pastoral care with the work of a qualified sex offender treatment provider.

The Ice Berg: the hidden dangers of an unknown sexual history

Another aspect of sexual offending that religious institutions should be aware of is the “cross over” behaviors many offenders engage in. According to a number of polygraph studies, many offenders engage in more than one type of offending. As many as two-thirds of men who sexually assault women also molest children, about one-third of men who molest girls also molest boys and half to three-quarters of child molesters abuse both related and non-related children.¹¹ The majority of men arrested for using child pornography have also been found to have sexually abused children and nearly half of the young men arrested for statutory rape were found to have abused younger children.¹² Self-report and polygraph studies also confirm the fact that sex offenders “get away with” many more crimes than are reported. An early self-report study from Washington State (where the offenders were simply asked to volunteer information about their history of sexually offending), revealed an average of 120 separate sex crimes per offender.¹³ Another study, produced

(last accessed March 27, 2018).

10. Jan Hindman and James M. Peters, “Polygraph Testing Leads to better Understanding Adult and Juvenile Sex Offenders,” *Federal Probation* 65 (2001): 8–15.

11. Gene G. Abel, Judith V. Becker, Mary Mittelman, Jerry Cunningham-Rathner, Joanne L. Rouleau, and William D. Murphy, “Self-reported Sex Crimes of Nonincarcerated Paraphiliacs,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 2 (1987): 3–25; Kim English, “Combo of Polygraph & Treatment Reveals Many Sex Offenders Offend Across Multiple Relationship, Age, Gender and Crime Type Categories,” *Elements of Change* 5 (2000): 1–8; Peggy Heil, Sean Ahlmeyer, and Dominique Simons, “Cross Over Sexual Offenses,” *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 15 (2003): 221–236; Daphne J. Sim, and Michael Proeve, “Crossover and Stability of Victim Type in Child Molesters,” *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 15 (2010): 401–413.

12. Michael L. Bourke and Andres E. Hernandez, “The ‘Butner Study Redux: A Report of the Incidence of Hands-on Child Victimization by Child Pornography Offenders,” *Journal of Family Violence* 24 (2008): 183–191; Kim English, “Combo of Polygraph & Treatment Reveals Many Sex Offenders Offend Across Multiple Relationship, Age, Gender and Crime Type Categories,” *Elements of Change* 5 (2000): 1–8.

13. Mark R. Weinrott and Maureen Saylor, “Self-report of Crimes Committed by Sex Offenders,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*

According to a number of polygraph studies, many offenders engage in more than one type of offending. As many as two-thirds of men who sexually assault women also molest children, about one-third of men who molest girls also molest boys and half to three-quarters of child molesters abuse both related and non-related children.

by a psychologist who treated “low risk” men on probation in the community but required all of his clients to complete a polygraph examination regarding their sexual history, found an average of 198 sex crimes per man¹⁴ and the Hindman study¹⁵ revealed an average of twelve child victims per offender. Certainly, there are offenders who get caught after a short period of offending and even some whose crimes were limited to one child. Unfortunately, those cases are rare.

None of the above information was known to authorities at the time of conviction or sentencing and was only disclosed by the offenders while they were in treatment. As such, none of this information would show up in a criminal background check and the only way a religious institution might know the extent of the offender’s history would be to require a release of information for the treatment provider and seek out the information. What these studies also underscore is the fact that none of us truly know the extent of another person’s sexual history and when the person is a known sex offender, caution and skepticism are well advised. Add to that the determination and skill involved in offending and one might understand the need for team work in helping an offender become increasingly accountable.

“Grooming” behavior: how offenders manipulate victims and churches

Given the fact that most sex offenders started offending at a young age and typically engage in a sometimes life-long and varied history of offending, one can appreciate the learning curve involved. The goal of the offender is to remain undetected in the community and that requires purposeful planning and manipulation of chil-

6 (1991): 286–300.

14. Michael Alexander, “Using Polygraph Testing to Assess Deviant Sexual History of Sex Offenders,” *Dissertation Abstracts International* 49 (University of Washington, 1998): MI 48106.

15. Jan Hindman and James M. Peters, “Polygraph Testing Leads to Better Understanding Adult and Juvenile Sex Offenders,” *Federal Probation* 65 (2001): 8–15.

dren, adults and institutions. Historically, the faith community has been extremely vulnerable because we don't expect offenders to be part of our community and are poorly prepared to be on guard.¹⁶ Pastors, lay leaders and parishioners have rarely had opportunities to be trained in the behaviors to watch out for and the training they do receive rarely comes from child abuse experts.¹⁷ Offenders describe a progressive pattern of selecting and targeting vulnerable children and families, presenting themselves as a safe and trustworthy Christian and committing the majority of their crimes in private. Their behavior with children is aimed at instilling trust and loyalty and they can trick children into believing the boy or girl is mutually involved and sometimes benefitting from the affection and attention that goes along with the sex abuse. Children become fearful of what might happen if anyone finds out or fearful they will get the offender in trouble and lose a close friend or mentor. Some offenders have even bragged about how easy it is to fool church people.¹⁸ According to one convicted child molester:

I consider church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians... They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people...I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince [them], with or without convincing words.¹⁹

Sex offender treatment: How it works and how faith communities can help

Although the specific methodologies used in sex offender treatment programs vary, the goals are simple: protect the community by reducing re-offense rates and assist sex offenders in developing a balanced and pro-social (productive and non-criminal) lifestyle. Selecting an appropriate treatment begins with an assessment.

Sex offender evaluations

Most credible programs (and not all providers are credible) begin with a comprehensive evaluation process of each client that includes a thorough review of all pertinent police reports/victim statements and criminal records, and an extensive interview process to collect social, educational, employment/ military, sexual and criminal history. Offenders also complete a battery of tests to assess mental illness or personality disorders (such as anti-sociality personality disorder or psychopathy) and psychological problems (such as "emotional neediness," depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc.).

Offenders also complete surveys that attempt to evaluate the

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degree of pro-offending attitudes. Although few would outwardly admit it, child molesters tend to have distorted attitudes about the appropriateness or impact of child sexual abuse. For example, common beliefs for child molesters include: "some children enjoy sexual contact with adults" and "not all children are harmed by sexual contact with adults."

Clinicians also employ sex offender specific tests that measure sexual deviancy and compulsivity, plus other types of Paraphilic behavior (Exhibitionism, Voyeurism, Fetishism, Bondage/Discipline, Sexual Sadism, Masochism, Bestiality, etc.). In addition, factors related to substance abuse, denial, culpability, accountability and the presence of appropriate social support systems are assessed along with the offender's motivation to cooperate and make progress in treatment.

One of the more common aspects of sex offender evaluation and treatment involves sexual arousal testing and aversive conditioning. Comprehensive programs use sexual arousal testing (via the penile plethysmograph) to determine the percentage of arousal to all age groups, both genders and violence. This involves attaching a strain gauge to the penis and measuring erectile responses while the person is exposed to various visual and auditory stimulus material. A different type of test involves having the offender participate in visual reaction time measures (which measure the amount of time subjects look at images of children versus how long they look at images of adults). Most agencies also require that offenders complete a "full disclosure" sexual history polygraph examination in order to collect all of the relevant sexual history information. And, while some clinicians do not use these measures, they have proven to be the most reliable methods of properly assessing sexual deviancy and risk because, understandably, most offenders are reluctant to divulge (and sometimes do not even know) the full extent of their offending or deviant arousal. Clinicians who require "full disclosure" from offenders see providers who expect less as something akin to treating a dangerous medical disorder without running all of the proper tests or determining how far the disease has spread. When faith communities have someone in their midst who has offended but they do not know the full extent of the person's history, it becomes more difficult to protect children and other vulnerable people in the congregation.

16. Donna Eshuys and Stephen Smallbone, "Religious Affiliations Among Adult Sexual Offenders," *Sex Abuse* 18 (2006): 279-288.

17. Victor I. Vieth, "Suffer the Children," *Jacob's Hope* 2 (2011): 1-8.

18. Ann Salter, "Truth, Lies and Sex Offenders," (1997), a DVD training series available through Specialized Training Services, http://www.annasalter.com/annasalter/DVDS_%26_BOOKS.html (last viewed March 23, 2018).

19. Anna Salter, *Predators* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1991): 29.

The last method of assessment involves actuarial risk assessment (similar to the types of formulas used by insurance companies to determine insurance rates) which, in most cases, can assist in producing a more accurate picture of an individual's risk. In some cases, though, risk assessments completely miss the mark. For example, an offender can sexually abuse 100 children and still be labeled as a "low risk" to recidivate (get caught again in the future) simply because he or she has gotten away with offending so often that the likelihood of being caught again is "low." For religious organizations, the best stance is to assume that all sex offenders present a moderate or higher risk of re-offending because believing someone poses a "low risk" may inadvertently predispose the organization to gradually allow the person to engage in risky behavior, which, in turn, increases the possibility an offender will harm another child.

Sex offender treatment

Once an offender has been evaluated and admitted into treatment (inpatient prison/hospital or outpatient), a variety of activities and expectations follow. Most offenders participate in a combination of individual, group and family/support group therapy. The focus of treatment is on challenging and replacing faulty cognitions related to sexual offending and unhealthy sexual behavior (risky sex, pornography, etc.), developing pro-social lifestyles and relationships, (employment, social/recreational pursuits and healthy intimate relationships with appropriate partners). Treatment also requires that offenders develop and implement a risk management plan or "relapse prevention" plan, along with "approach goals" that extend the plan past what should be avoided to include issues related to how the offender can be the most satisfied and successful with their lifestyle and routines.

Managing sex offenders in the congregation

Most programs encourage offenders to become involved in outdoor, recreational or volunteer activities, or join a faith-based community as long as the risk can be managed. Unfortunately, most providers have had clients who actively preyed on these groups in the past and have learned that participation can come with a cost, both to the offender and the organization. The stigma of having sex offenders as members or even just attendees has a downside, but the fact remains, there are more offenders in a congregation than people are aware of and handling the "known" offenders in a compassionate, yet cautious manner, serves everyone best. If a religious institution is overly negative, the unknown offenders are less likely to reveal themselves, but if the institution is overly accepting or forgiving, they are prone to being taken advantage of and their children put at risk. Because of this, most offender treatment programs will only allow low to moderately low risk offenders to attend community activities or religious services after a prolonged period of time in treatment, gradual progress in treatment and ongoing demonstration of responsible risk management behaviors.

Prior to an offender attending an activity where children might

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be present, offenders are usually required to prepare a contract or "safety plan" that outlines the activity and rules the offender will commit to following during the activity.²⁰ An informed chaperone is usually required and debriefing follows each activity to insure that the offender is abiding by the rules, not having sexual fantasies or experiencing arousal to the children they see. Typical rules relate to minimizing contact and interaction with children, never being alone with children and making sure that all parents of children he/she comes in contact with have been informed of the offender's status and rules. There are also rules about which bathroom the offender can use, which entrance and exit to use and parts of the building that must be avoided (children's areas). Most treatment providers and parole/probation officers require a phone conversation or a face to face meeting with the group prior to allowing an offender to participate in activities to insure that everyone, including the offender, truly understands the offender's history, accepts the notion of "life-long risk," and has the capacity to follow the treatment rules and guidelines forever. Groups that advocate a "forgive and forget" mentality or see the offender as "cured" are usually seen as putting the offender (and children) at an unreasonable and unnecessary risk and the clinician or parole officer will be inclined to decline further requests. Faith-based organizations that offer counseling and accountability groups can also be a great source of support for offenders but can also undermine or provide conflicting messages.²¹

Coordinating pastoral care with sex offender treatment

Faith leaders wishing to support the treatment process must understand what the problems are, how treatment works, how to avoid enabling the offender by making excuses for him or her, and must avoid suggestions that the punishment is too harsh or that

20. Basyle Tchividjian & Shira M. Berkovits, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017), 139–149.

21. An excellent resource for appropriate guidelines in ministering to sex offenders is Victor I. Vieth, "Ministering to Sex Offenders: Ten Lessons from Henry Gerecke," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 112.3 (Summer 2015): 208.

treatment is un-Christian. Reminding offenders about the various passages related to child abuse and obeying the law can sometimes be helpful. One pastor even suggested to an offender that he should “consider your treatment team to be a part of the higher power you need to give yourself over to.” The issues of forgiveness and redemption can also be challenging in that the faith community can inappropriately or prematurely put pressure on victims to forgive their offender before they are ready and cause further trauma.²² Offenders can also use God’s forgiveness or redemption to avoid using the risk management techniques (such as never being alone with children) they were taught in treatment because “God has forgiven my sins and cured me.” Clergy and other faith leaders should challenge these and other cognitive distortions.

The importance of keeping watch

Controlling sexual deviancy and avoiding a re-offense is a daily process that never ends, despite how many years have passed since the offender was caught or how faithful they appear. Most providers have had clients who faked remorse or whose tears appeared to be sincere but, after more in-depth conversations, were determined to be entirely self-centered, not victim-centered in the least, or were otherwise engaged in a con job. There have also been cases where offenders were more than willing to overly disclose the details of their crimes in an effort to make other people think they were truly open and remorseful when in fact, the disclosure was part of a more advanced ruse to get people to trust them. Sex offenders have also been known to pretend they were a Christian in an effort to gain sympathy or access to children. Even if an offender is sincere, there is little evidence that full disclosure or true remorse reduces the likelihood of re-offending. In fact, they are unrelated variables. The moral of the story is that none of us truly knows what is in another person’s heart or soul and our paramount obligation is to protect the most vulnerable in our community. The other issue to keep in mind is that research has not been able to firmly establish whether or not sex offender treatment in fact “works.”

Re-offense vs. recidivism: reading between the lines

No one knows what the re-offense rates for sexual offenders truly are. The only thing we know is the percentage of offenders who get caught a second time. A landmark study from the ’80s indicated that only 3 percent of what the sex offenders in the sample had done was ever detected and there is little reason to believe things are much better in today’s world.²³ Therefore, although the recidivism (re-arrest/reconviction) rates are moderately low (5 to 24 percent),²⁴ these numbers only reflect the people who were

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caught a second time. Therefore, sex offender treatment providers strongly recommend that religious institutions use every tool at their disposal to insure the safety and welfare of children and never blindly give a sex offender the benefit of the doubt.

Conclusion

Although this article serves as an introduction for clergy and other faith leaders, it should be clear that working with sex offenders is extremely complex and no pastor should “go it alone.” In working with or managing a sex offender, it is critical to have appropriate policies to manage a sex offender in a congregation²⁵ and to work with sex offender treatment providers, criminal justice professionals and other experts who can assist a faith community.

22. Victor I. Vieth, “What Would Walther Do? Applying Law & Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 40 (2012): 257–273.

23. Abel, et al., “Self-reported Sex Crimes of Nonincarcerated Paraphiliacs,” 3–25.

24. Robert Przbyski, “Adult Sex Offender Recidivism,” in *Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative* (United

States Department of Justice SMART Office 2018), available online at: https://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/sec1/ch5_recidivism.html (last visited March 27, 2018).

25. Vieth, “Suffer the Children.”

Responding with Excellence to an Allegation of Sexual Abuse within the Church

Basyle J. Tchividjian¹

“My child just told me that the youth pastor has been having sex with her for the past three months.” Every church leader dreads this phone call. It’s what keeps pastors awake at night—in fear and trembling. Worst of all, these are conversations that often eventually drive abuse victims and their families out of the church. The anxiety that consumes pastors when responding to disclosures of such evil are often fueled by church leaders and members being uneducated on abuse and wholly ill-prepared to properly respond to this most egregious of offenses.

It’s not a matter of if, but when, a church is faced with reports of child sexual abuse perpetrated by a member of their own community, whether it be pastoral staff, a volunteer, or a member of the congregation. All too often, this alleged offender will be a widely respected, influential, and well-loved individual.² How a faith institution confronts and responds to such a disclosure will not only have potential to save or destroy lives but will also speak volumes about whether it places the lives of individuals over the reputation and life of the institution. The purpose of this article is to provide some fundamentals on effective ways for congregations to respond to child sexual abuse disclosures.³

Contact the authorities. When a pastor or church leader receives a disclosure of child sexual abuse, one of the first questions that should be asked is, “Has this been reported to the proper authorities?” If it hasn’t been reported, one of the first steps should be to encourage and direct the person disclosing the abuse to immediately contact the authorities. The pastor should also inform the person that he/she will be reporting the allegation as well. Often one of the most pastoral responses to a disclosure is for the pastor to accompany the individual in reporting the offense.

As I work with congregations and other Christian institutions,

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I often encounter professing Christians who struggle with whether they should first report suspected child abuse to the civil authorities. A church elder once told me that if he received a disclosure of child sexual abuse, his first response would be to interview the alleged victim. His rationale was that he wanted to “be sure that the allegations are legitimate before reporting to the police and ruining the man’s reputation.” When asked what training he had to conduct a child forensic interview, the man was silent. When asked whether he wanted the responsibility to determine the validity of a very serious felony, he started to shrink back in his chair. I then asked whether he was prepared to violate mandated reporting laws. Fortunately, the elder got my point, changed his opinion, and acknowledged his need to learn more about child sexual abuse. An issue often at the heart of this critical struggle is whether the Church is obligated to subject itself to the laws of humans when it believes that it is capable to address the sin “in-house.”

Let’s make sure we all understand one important truth: child sexual abuse is both a sin AND a serious crime. In order to effectively carry out its responsibility of protecting children and

1. The author is the executive director of Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE).

2. See the book review: “Predators, Pedophiles, Rapists, and other Sexual Offenders by Anna Salter,” in *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 11 No. 1, January 2005: 139–142 https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1103&context=soc_facpub (last accessed on May 18, 2018).

3. What is provided in this section only scratches the surface on the numerous and complex issues related to how congregations respond to a child sexual abuse disclosure. However, it is my hope and prayer that what is provided will be enough to help church leaders see and understand the need to learn more.

punishing perpetrators, all fifty states have laws that mandate certain citizens to report suspected neglect or abuse of children. Violation of mandated reporting laws not only fails to protect children, but also enables the perpetrator to avoid criminal prosecution. Scripture says, “For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.”⁴ This clearly indicates that a central purpose of civil government is to do good. If that is the case, can there be any greater good carried out by civil government than to enforce laws designed to protect society’s most vulnerable members? In order to carry out this good, the authorities must be notified of the alleged offense, regardless of whether such a report is required by law. Governments are incapable of protecting little ones and holding offenders accountable if citizens remain silent in the face of such evil. When in doubt, report!

Care for the victim. The safety and care of the alleged victim must always come first. When the victim and the alleged offender are part of the same faith community, the initial response by the institution is often to try and figure out an equitable way to address the matter without “offending” either party. Such an approach will always fail. It is critical for church leaders to understand that their ultimate responsibility is to protect and care for the most vulnerable members of their church. Jesus was always on the side of the vulnerable and the wounded. The focus of the Good Samaritan was to ensure that the badly victimized traveler was brought to safety and provided whatever was necessary for healing. The Samaritan didn’t seem to care if his actions offended those who had inflicted the wounds. Isn’t that the ultimate story of the Gospel? Jesus stepped into our vulnerable and wounded lives in order to bring us safety and ultimate healing. As we respond to abuse disclosures, our focus should mirror that of the ultimate Good Samaritan. We must filter every decision with this question: *How does this decision protect and care for the alleged victim?* Caring for and protecting the reported victim can be lived out by the congregation in many ways, including:

Taking the time to listen—and learn. Those who care best listen most. This was most evidenced by the life of Jesus. The wounded and broken were drawn to him because he took time to listen and learn about each of them. By doing so, he was approachable and safe. One of the first steps in demonstrating care for the wounded is to consciously create a community where he/she feels safe and heard.

Always put the victim first. The concern and care for the reported victim must take priority, even if it doesn’t seem fair to the alleged offender. For example, if the child is an attendee of the church, he/she must never be placed in a position of having to encounter the alleged offender on the church property. That may require church leaders to direct the accused to remain away from the church until further notice. Such directives will be seen by some (especially those who are friends with the alleged offender) to be harsh and unfair. The reality is that this type

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of approach demonstrates a church culture that prioritizes the traumatized over the inconvenienced.

Assign a member of leadership as a liaison who will be in regular contact with the victim and the family to walk with them through this deeply traumatic season. If possible, it is best to select a leadership representative who already has an existing relationship with the family. Prior to serving in this role, it is recommended that this person receive training on abuse and victimization. Such training can be through a reputable organization or through the reading of a reputable book on the subject. Furthermore, it’s important to make sure that this representative understands his/her role and limitations. For example, the representative should not attempt to engage in counseling, but could work with the family in connecting them with a qualified counselor. Such roles and limitations must be clearly spelled out prior to serving this family in need.

In addition to a liaison, the leadership should work to develop a support network within the congregation especially during court-related matters. Walking through the judicial process can be a very difficult, lonely, and re-traumatizing process for many victims and their families. A support network can help shoulder these burdens while also providing practical assistance such as child care during court hearings, meals during the trial, and words of encouragement and support along the way.

Always look through the lens of the child. A child sexual abuse survivor once told me, “Don’t ever stop seeing through the eyes of the child victim.” It is natural to approach and respond to a crisis through the lens of our own life experiences or through the collective lens of those responding to the crisis. When responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse, church leaders must be intentional about viewing every decision through the lens of the child victim. If a decision or the consequences of it could be seen by a child as hurtful, dismissive, confusing, or even demonstrating greater care for the alleged offender, it’s a poor decision and must not be made. Looking through the lens of the child victim not only empathizes with the wounded, but it also tells the child that they are worthy and supported.

Seek outside expertise. Most church leaders are educated and trained to be church leaders. That may sound like an oversimpli-

4. Rom 13:4 [English Standard Version].

fied statement, but it is often forgotten by church leaders when responding to a crisis such as a disclosure of child sexual abuse. The truth is that even if a pastor or church leader has received some training on this issue, they still don't have the needed tools in their toolbox to effectively address the many complex issues and dynamics associated with sexual abuse. Furthermore, if the alleged perpetrator is a colleague or member of the church community, the church leader will undoubtedly struggle with an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Not having the right tools coupled with the strong possibility of a conflict of interest, is a recipe for poor decisions that can have a lifetime affect upon the victim and many others inside and outside of the church. Obtaining the assistance of those who have experience and expertise with understanding and addressing matters related to child sexual abuse will provide church leaders with a toolbox filled with the resources needed to see through the lens of the child in making informed decisions. The expert must be an individual or organization that is trained and experienced with understanding the complex dynamics of abuse, the common behavioral patterns of abusers, and working with and serving those who have been abused. It's also very helpful if the expert has experience addressing abuse related issues within the context of faith communities. The type of expert needed is not a management attorney, nor a public relations firm. The type of expert needed is someone such as a former child sexual abuse investigator, prosecutor, or an organization comprised of a multi-disciplinary group of professionals who are trained and experienced with addressing issues related to the abuse of children within faith communities. It is critical to remember that this expert is not needed to help protect the congregation, but to ensure that the congregation responds properly to abuse disclosures with a focus on how best to love and serve the wounded.

Shepherd the accused. Merriam-Webster defines "shepherd" as "to guide or guard in the manner of a shepherd."⁵ The primary responsibility of church leaders when addressing a member who has been accused of sexually abusing a child is to guide and guard the rest of the church body, especially the children. Repeated studies have found that only between 1–7 percent of child sexual abuse allegations are false.⁶ Thus, at least 93 percent of such allegations are true. These statistics should mean that church leaders don't give the accused the benefit of the doubt when it comes to making decisions regarding protective measures that will restrict his/her activities within the life of the congregation.⁷ Immediate restrictions should include prohibiting the accused from being on the church property, and from participating in church-sponsored functions. If the alleged offender is an employee of the church, he/she must be immediately placed upon administrative leave until

5. See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shepherd> (last accessed on May 18, 2018).

6. See <http://www.leadershipcouncil.org/1/res/csa-acc.html> (last accessed on May 18, 2018).

7. Such restrictions can be outlined in a limited access agreement with the accused. See *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide*, by Shira Bercovits and Basyle Tchividjian, (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017), 111–117.

Not having the right tools coupled with the strong possibility of a conflict of interest, is a recipe for poor decisions that can have a lifetime affect upon the victim and many others inside and outside of the church.

further notice.⁸ Properly shepherding not only necessitates the imposition of restrictions, but it also requires that leaders clearly communicate to the accused that though they aren't going to take sides, their decisions will be based upon the best interests of the child. How the accused responds to such a directive will often set the tone for how he/she will respond to future shepherding. As part of the shepherding process, a leader should be assigned to be in constant and open communication with the accused and his/her family providing prayer and spiritual guidance. For example, if the alleged offender is prohibited from attending church services, he/she could be encouraged to listen to the weekly sermons and meet with the liaison on a regular basis to discuss them.⁹ It is also the responsibility of the liaison to ensure that neither the accused nor his/her family are engaging in behaviors or communications that are hurtful to the reported victim or the victim's family.¹⁰

One of the more significant (and difficult) roles of shepherding the accused is the need for church leadership to eventually confront him/her on the abuse allegations. It is critical that such a confrontation be done with the assistance of the expert and only after conferring with the investigating agency. Timing is everything.¹¹

The length of this article prohibits me from addressing other critically important issues related to shepherding accused offenders. For example, what should church leaders do if and when the authorities decide not to prosecute? Or, what if the accused is prosecuted but found "not guilty" at trial? These questions and more can and should be addressed by church leaders in conjunction with expert assistance.

Congregational care. As church leaders rush to respond to child sexual abuse allegations, they often overlook an important group of people who are closely watching the situation and the decisions being made. Statistics tell us that one in four women and one in six

8. These types of restrictions must be implemented until the church leadership is in a better position to obtain additional information to assess a host of issues related to the allegations, the victim, and whether the accused poses any risk to others. Often, this information is best obtained and assessed with the assistance of law enforcement and a child protection expert.

9. Most churches post their sermons online.

10. This can take many forms. Some include, open threats, bad-mouthing the victim/family, or the accused claiming to be the "real victim" in an effort to seek sympathy from church members.

11. If there is an ongoing criminal investigation, church leaders should never do anything that could compromise the investigation.

men will be sexually abused before the age of eighteen.¹² To keep the math simple, that means in a church with 100 men and 100 women, 20.5 percent of the congregation are child sexual abuse survivors. This is a sobering reminder that our churches are filled with abuse survivors, most of whom are still struggling in some way with the lifelong pains caused by this trauma. Sexual assault survivors are at a heightened risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can be triggered when learning of other abuse disclosures.¹³ Throughout the process of responding to the underlying abuse disclosure, it is vitally important that the leadership send a clear message that the church is a safe place that welcomes and affirms survivors of abuse. This message can come in different forms such as:

- Informing the congregation about the allegations of abuse and directing parents to local resources and professionals who can help determine if their child was also victimized.¹⁴
- Making sure the congregation knows that the leadership has taken immediate measures to ensure the safety of their children.
- Appointing a pastor or staff member who can encourage and assist other abuse survivors with getting connected to qualified local resources such as professional counselors.
- Engaging outside professional assistance to train and equip both the leadership and general membership on matters related to child protection.¹⁵
- Preaching sermons on the sin of sexual abuse and those who perpetrate it.¹⁶

These are just a few of many steps church leaders can take to care for a hurting congregation that often finds itself triggered, confused, and sometimes frustrated when child sexual abuse allegations surface.¹⁷ Being intentional about creating specific ways to care for and serve the church body can bring hope and healing to many during a dark and difficult season in the life of the congregation.

12. See <https://www.nsopw.gov/en-US/Education/FactsStatistics?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1#reference> (last accessed on May 18, 2018).

13. See <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/ptsd-overview/women/sexual-assault-females.asp> (last accessed on May 18, 2018).

14. The details of the abuse and the identity of the victim should not be disclosed. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that church leaders seek counsel from the law enforcement agency investigating the allegations regarding the content of what will be shared with the congregation.

15. Such as the GRACE Child Safeguarding Certification Initiative. See <http://www.netgrace.org/certification/>.

16. In preparation for such sermons, I highly encourage pastors to spend much time researching the topic, learning from experts, and speaking with and listening to, abuse survivors.

17. For additional ways congregations can serve abuse survivors, see “7 ways to welcome abuse survivors in our churches” at <https://religionnews.com/2014/05/16/7-ways-welcome-abuse-survivors-churches/> (Last accessed on May 18, 2018).

Our churches are filled with abuse survivors, most of whom are still struggling in some way with the lifelong pains caused by this trauma.

Policy protocol. A proper and informed response to child sexual abuse disclosures within a congregation should be outlined in a written abuse response protocol that is developed by the church with the assistance of child protection experts.¹⁸ This will provide a much-needed roadmap to church leaders who will often find themselves tempted to make uninformed off-the-cuff decisions when responding to dire circumstances. Such a decision-making process can have devastating consequences. This may be okay when you're deciding on the color of the church carpet, but not when it involves responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse. Having a response protocol is a tremendous tool for ensuring that the decisions made by church leaders who learn of abuse are informed and consistently applied in a manner that best serves all parties.

Congregations who put in the time up front to do the hard work in preparing for the moment when that dreaded call is received will be uniquely positioned to respond in a way that reflects the love and hope of Jesus amid incomprehensible pain. The invaluable lives of those made in God's image deserve nothing less.

18. See Bercovits and Tchividjian, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide*, chapters 10–13.

Improving the Response to Male Sexual Abuse: A Primer for Communities of Faith

Christopher M. Anderson¹

Introduction

After friends, spouses, and therapists, clergy are among the most likely individuals to receive first disclosures of sexual abuse from male victims.² There are many reasons why a survivor may feel more comfortable disclosing to a member of the clergy than law enforcement, teachers, or other authority figures. In many communities, pastors and other faith leaders possess moral integrity and trust that lead many people, especially vulnerable and hurting individuals, to turn to them for advice and counsel. In addition, there are fewer logistical barriers to speaking with faith leaders: often it is easier to speak with a member of the clergy than to find and schedule appointments with mental health professionals. In rural areas, it can also be more difficult to access professional mental health resources due to lack of professional providers. In these areas, leaders in faith communities often fill a needed role of counselor and/or confidant. It should also be noted that, typically, there is no out-of-pocket cost to confide in a pastor, whereas professional mental health providers usually charge for services. Lastly, a clergy member is often someone already known and, to some degree, trusted by a survivor. The expectation of confidentiality a pastor enjoys is also of critical importance to a survivor. The promise of absolute confidentiality in the relationship of priest/pastor to penitent provides male survivors, who often feel increased feelings of shame and stigma,³ extra reassurance that can help them feel safe enough to come forward.

Unfortunately, many individuals entrusted with overseeing the spiritual care of their communities are not adequately informed about the preponderance of sexual abuse against males, the risk factors, and best practices for preventing sexual abuse against boys and providing trauma informed support for victims who disclose. A poor, incompetent response often exacerbates the problem, with researchers finding that “negative responses” to a disclosure of sexual assault “are positively associated with symptoms of PTSD

It is of critical importance that all people of influence and leadership in communities of faith become more sensitized to the facts of male sexual victimization and the lessons of trauma.

and depression.”⁴

Therefore it is of critical importance that all people of influence and leadership in communities of faith become more sensitized to the facts of male sexual victimization and the lessons of trauma.

Important facts about male sexual victimization

There are a number of myths and mistaken assumptions that lie behind much of the stigma faced by male victims of sexual abuse. Any person who is in a position of trust and leadership in a community of faith—whether a lay leader, pastor, or reverend—must be informed about these facts in order to ensure they will be empowered to counter the cancerous harm done by these myths.

Men and boys experience rape and other forms of sexual abuse at extraordinarily high rates.

Decades of research make clear at least one in six boys will experience some form of sexual molestation prior to their eighteenth birthday.⁵ As many as one in four males will experience some form of sexual abuse during their lifetime.⁶

4. Valentina Nikulina, *Responses to Sexual Assault Disclosure and Survivor's Symptoms of PTSD and Depression: Does Race/Ethnicity of Sexual Assault Survivor and Disclosure Recipient Matter?* (St. John's University 2009), 10.

5. Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, eds. Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, and Clare Pain (Cambridge Medicine, 2010), 78–79.

6. Matthew J. Breiding, “Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual

1. Christopher M. Anderson is a survivor advocate and the former executive director of MaleSurvivor, a national organization that works to provide hope, healing, and support to male survivors of sexual trauma and their loved ones.

2. Scott D. Easton, “Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse among Adult Male Survivors,” *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 41 (2013): 344–355.

3. *Ibid.*, 345.

It is also important to understand “sexual abuse” is a term that encompasses a much wider range of experiences than “rape,” which is commonly perceived as an act of bodily penetration.⁷ The confusion around this is part of what leads to mistaken assumptions that males experience far less sexual abuse than females. In short, any time a person is touched, or feels pressure to consent to touch they don’t want, there is the potential for sexual abuse to occur and significant trauma to be experienced.

Most sexually abused boys and men delay disclosing the abuse.

Many advocacy organizations and advocates in the sexual violence field recognize that survivors of sexual abuse delay disclosure for years. This makes sexual abuse one of the most difficult crimes to investigate, prosecute, and, perhaps most importantly, from which to heal. Some research shows that male survivors of child sexual abuse delay initially disclosing the abuse for over twenty years on average, and almost thirty years until “helpful in-depth discussions” occur for survivors.⁸ Often these decades are marked by significant suffering—depression, anxiety, and disruption of interpersonal relationships.⁹ Survivors are also at significantly higher risk for a wide range of negative health outcomes, including substance abuse, diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, and consequently have lower life expectancies.¹⁰

Boys attending church may be particularly susceptible to sexual abuse.

Clinicians and researchers who interview and work with serial offenders report that communities of faith are especially at risk for being targeted by perpetrators because they offer access to large numbers of children and often readily offer forgiveness for past misdeeds.¹¹ It is also well known that within many communities of faith, young males can be at significant risk because of participation in many church-organized youth service activities (such as camps, scouts, and church sponsored sports) that can put them in extended contact with potential perpetrators. There is also a bias within many communities that boys require less protection from perpetrators than girls. However, data on perpetrators and their targets suggest a far different picture. Some research into offenders has detailed that, on average, serial sexual offenders who target

Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization—National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Surveillance Summaries* 63.8 (Washington, D.C.: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014), 1.

7. Ibid.

8. Easton, “Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse among Adult Male Survivors,” 349.

9. Ibid., 350

10. Vincent J. Filetti, Robert F. Anda, et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14.4 (1998): 245.

11. Anna C. Salter, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, and other Sex Offenders*. (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 29.

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young boys have over 150 victims on average.¹² This is almost three times the number of victims than for offenders who target girls.

Most sexual abuse of boys is NOT perpetrated by homosexual males.

Regardless of any community’s specific interpretation of biblical teachings on same sex conduct, linking homosexuality to child sexual abuse is misleading and harmful. According to MaleSurvivor’s website, “One of the most damaging, and profoundly mistaken, beliefs about male sexual abuse is that perpetrators of abuse against boys are usually gay males. This is false, and has been demonstrated as false in research for many years.”¹³ Clinical researchers and law enforcement professionals have understood for decades that most perpetrators of sexual abuse against boys actually identify as heterosexual.¹⁴ Many of the most dangerous and prolific abusers, such as Jerry Sandusky,¹⁵ rely on the protection of being married to better hide their illicit and abusive activity. In addition, it’s important to acknowledge that there are many female perpetrators of abuse against boys.¹⁶

It is possible for a victim of abuse to experience physical pleasure, an erection, and even an orgasm.

A significant source of shame, misunderstanding, and vulnerability for boys who are abused is the lack of clarity on how our bodies naturally respond to certain kinds of contact and stimulation. Contrary to popular belief, biological responses to sexual stimulation—such as erections, physical and mental feelings of pleasure,

12. Kenneth V. Lanning, *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis for Professionals Investigating the Sexual Exploitation of Children*. (Alexandria, Va.: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010).

13. For additional information on this issue, see the website of MaleSurvivor at: <http://www.malesurvivor.org/fact-2/>

14. Gene Abel, “The Child Abuser: How Can You Spot Him?” *Redbook* (August, 1987), 100.

15. For an account of Jerry Sandusky’s sexual abuse of boys, see Aaron Fisher, *Silent No More: Victim Number 1’s Fight for Justice Against Jerry Sandusky* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012).

16. For an overview of research on female sex offenders, see Dominique A. Simons, “Sex Offender Typologies,” in *Sex Offender Management Assessment & Planning Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Justice, Sex Offender Sentencing Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering & Tracking, 2018), available online at: https://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/sec1/ch3_typology.html (last visited January 21, 2018).

release of pre-ejaculatory fluids, and even orgasms themselves—are not processes that can be fully or easily controlled through an act of will. In short, the body will do what it is wired to do. Especially in the case of younger males, physical responses to stimuli can be especially sensitive.¹⁷

Communities that shun open and frank discussions of the biological facts of sex and normal sexual functioning risk contributing to feelings of confusion and shame connected to misunderstandings about normal human sexual functioning. This opens broad avenues for perpetrators to successfully target and control their victims.

Assume, for example, a boy has never been instructed by family or in a formal educational setting about how his body actually works. As he begins to enter puberty he feels confusion and shame over uncontrolled thoughts, fantasies, and biological responses such as unwanted and/or unconscious erections. This boy can fall prey to a perpetrator in many ways. First, the perpetrator can offer information, instruction, and shame-free reassurances that sex is “OK” and “natural” that he cannot receive from proper channels. Second, the abuser can be a source of “adult” things, providing access to pornography, alcohol, and other substances the victim’s pubescent brain will be unable to easily resist or maturely process. Third, the victim’s ignorance and curiosity can be easily manipulated by a perpetrator. For example, the offender may say that his erection is a sign the boy must “want” to engage in the abuse, or that he is enjoying the abuse. Lastly, the abuser can use threats to expose the victim to his family and community to enforce silence from the victim.

Sexual abuse does not determine sexual identity or orientation, or make a victim more likely to become an abuser.

Another significant source of confusion, stigma, and shame is lack of consensus about what are the causal factors that determine a person’s sexual orientation. As Richard Gartner, a leading expert on sexual abuse of boys, has written:

While scientists don’t agree about what causes sexual orientation, most researchers and psychologists believe it’s established in early childhood before the age when boys are likely to be sexually abused.¹⁸

It is also critically important to make clear that the vast majority of male victims do not go on to perpetrate sexual abuse, while only a small proportion of perpetrators report having been abused as children.¹⁹

17. In his memoirs of being sexually abused at a summer church camp, Martin Moran describes this confusion in great detail. Martin Moran, *The Tricky Part* (New York: Anchor, 2006).

18. Richard B. Gartner, *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life after Boyhood Sexual Abuse*. (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 99.

19. Chelsea Leach, Anna Stewart, and Stephen Smallbone, “Testing the Sexually Abused-sexual Abuser Hypothesis: a Prospective Longitudinal Birth Cohort Study,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 51 (2016): 144–153.

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Both facts give rise to significant shame and confusion for victims, especially for victims of same-sex perpetrators who inhabit communities where homosexuality is viewed to be sinful conduct.

Females can and do perpetrate sexual abuse at significant rates.

There are major cultural blind spots within which female perpetrators can often offend against many male victims in ways that are literally “unseen” by both the victims themselves and community members. In a study by Lisak, 40 percent of male survivors reported at least one female perpetrator.²⁰ Perhaps more surprising, Dr. Bryana French interviewed over 300 high school- and college-aged males and over 43 percent of respondents reported being “coerced” into participating in unwanted sexual activity.²¹ The respondents also reported that 95 percent of the perpetrators were female.²²

Boys make up approximately half of the victims of sexual trafficking.

A study by The John Jay College and the Center for Court Innovation estimated that as many as half of the commercially sexually exploited (CSE) children in the United States were boys.²³ In a related study done in Alberta, Canada, Dr. Susan McIntyre notes that “Young men [who are CSE victims] have service needs that are different than young women” and males “enter the trade younger

20. David Lisak, Jim Hopper, and Pat Song, “Factors in the Cycle of Violence: Gender Rigidity and Emotional Constriction,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9 (1996): 721–743.

21. Bryana H. French, Jasmine D. Tilghman, and Dominique A. Malebranche. “Sexual Coercion Context and Psychosocial Correlates Among Diverse Males,” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 16.1 (2015): 42.

22. Ibid.

23. Sara Ann Friedman and Nora B. Willis, *And Boys Too: An ECPAT-USA Discussion Paper about the Lack of Recognition of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Boys in the United States*. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: ECPAT-USA 2013).

and stay longer than young women.²⁴ Anchor House, a faith-based residential treatment program for male victims of sex trafficking in North Carolina, states on their website, “Continuing to leave the issue of male sex trafficking unaddressed only reinforces the repetitive cycle and does no more than resolve victims to give in to their enslavement. Moreover, it leaves no room for boys and men to receive the care they so desperately deserve for complete healing and personal development.”²⁵

The simple fact is that many boys and men who escape from abusive homes have little choice but to engage in survival sex in order to find food, shelter, and safety.

What should communities of faith do?

The facts listed above lead to a clear and pressing question. What should communities of faith do to take positions of responsible, ethical leadership in the efforts to prevent and respond to the sexual victimization of boys and men? There are at least seven concrete steps every congregation can and should take.

Training

We cannot know what we do not know. If we are ignorant of the facts of male sexual abuse, we are powerless to do anything to address it. Communities of faith should make it a priority to learn about male sexual abuse by researching the topic and seeking out training from experts on these issues.²⁶

Begin by believing

Many survivors of sexual abuse fear that their stories will not be believed. Not only do perpetrators tell this to victims in order to pressure them into remaining silent, but for male victims, especially, cultural norms can reinforce the belief that boys and men cannot and should not be victims of abuse. Meanwhile, it is well known that false disclosures of sexual assault are rare.²⁷ Therefore it is critical that faith communities commit to responding to disclosures with belief and acceptance of victims’ accounts. It can be helpful to train all staff and volunteers on trauma-informed models of responding to initial disclosures.²⁸

24. Susan McIntyre, *Under the Radar: The Sexual Exploitation of Young Men—Western Canadian Edition*. (Calgary, Alberta: Hindsight Group, 2009).

25. <http://www.restoreonlife.org/boys/>

26. In addition to MaleSurvivor, GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment), Sacred Spaces, and the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center offer quality training on the sexual abuse of boys and men.

27. See e.g., Mark D. Everson and Barbara W. Boat, “False Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Children and Adolescents,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 28 (1989), 230–235.

28. There are a number of trauma-informed models for responding to disclosures of victimization. For one suggested method see <https://www.christophermanderson.com/single-post/2015/02/09/OpEd-Compassionate-support-can-improve-healing-for-survivors-of-abuse>.

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Talk about male victimization

In any and all efforts to react and respond to the threat of sexual abuse within communities of faith, it is critically important to remember that sexual abuse is a gender inclusive threat. Serial offenders often abuse male and female victims, and choose victims based on vulnerability and opportunity not just simple gender preference. Efforts to discuss sexual abuse that ignore or fail to specifically mention the risks to BOTH males and females are ineffective and can actually prevent male victims from coming forward to report and get the support they need to heal.²⁹

Be proactive

The work of prevention requires more than having staff members participate in an occasional compliance training every few years. Effectively preventing abuse and supporting the needs of victims requires a cultural shift. This shift demands enacting proactive vigilance, training for all personnel, and enforcement of appropriate youth protection policies.³⁰ These must be supplemented with ongoing discussions with the entire community about sexual abuse prevention and response.

Do not nickname body parts

A simple and effective measure that will help protect children from being abused is to destigmatize and encourage the use of proper biological terms for all body parts, especially genitalia. Children who are accustomed to using the correct terminology for their penises, anuses, and other body parts show that they are less ashamed of their bodies, which makes them less likely candidates for targeting by offenders. A child who uses correct terms for their body parts appears less vulnerable to a perpetrator, and is thus a riskier potential victim for the perpetrator. In the tragic event that a child is abused, investigation and eventual prosecution of an alleged perpetrator is made significantly easier when victims spontaneously use specific and appropriate terminology for their body parts.

29. As one example, see Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies*, (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2015).

30. Basyle Tchividjian & Shira M. Berkovits, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017).

Connect with community partners

It is impossible to create a culture of prevention in isolation. Communities of faith that are serious about wanting to reduce their risk of harboring potential perpetrators of abuse within their midst will actively seek out the support and collaboration of partners from other faith communities, abuse and prevention organizations, law enforcement, and the social services providers in their communities. This is especially important because it is known that serial offenders can often move from community to community without fear of being “outed” because of the lack of open communication with community partners.

Rethink and reframe sex and sexuality

To reinforce this point, if sex and sexuality are topics that are largely framed in negative ways (such as “Sex is sinful temptations that must be controlled or expressed only in ‘appropriate’ or ‘holy’ ways”) a perpetrator can easily position themselves to wield great power and influence over the child. Further, if a victim is fearful that being sexually abused has stained or ruined them in the eyes of God, how likely is it they will feel empowered to come forward and report the abuse they’ve experienced to spiritual leaders (especially if the perpetrator is him or herself a member of spiritual leadership in a faith community)?

Conclusion

The challenges male survivors present and experience are deeply felt, while being distinct and different from some of the issues experienced by women and girls who endure sexual abuse and trauma.

These specific traumas must be acknowledged and proactively responded to within a Christian ministerial framework. Even a

Within many faith communities, harm is further done to survivors because reconciliation with and forgiveness of perpetrators is a central theme of their response, effectively blocking attempts by survivors to protect themselves from additional traumatization.

superficial review of how communities of faith have often reacted to claims of sexual abuse by survivors shows a consistent lack of trauma-informed, compassionate, and effective response. It is far more common to see leadership of these communities pursue strategies that indemnify institutions and shield perpetrators from true accountability while silencing, shunning, and shaming survivors.³¹ Within many faith communities, harm is further done to survivors because reconciliation with and forgiveness of perpetrators is a central theme of their response, effectively blocking attempts by survivors to protect themselves from additional traumatization.

The suggestions outlined above share a common goal of protecting and enforcing community standards while making space to offer greater compassion and healing support to those who have been wronged.

31. E.g., Michael D’Antonio, *Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime and the Era of Catholic Scandal* (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2014).

Recognizing and Responding to Developmentally Appropriate and Inappropriate Sexual Behaviors of Children

Victor I. Vieth¹

Introduction

A concerned parent visits a pastor unsure what to make of her kindergartner touching the genitals of his baby brother. A youth minister overhears a confirmand making explicit jokes about sexual assault with his friends. A Sunday school teacher walks into a women's restroom and discovers a seven-year-old girl licking the vaginal area of a five-year-old girl.

These are all actual cases arising in myriad faith communities. When these and similar cases come to the attention of faith leaders, we are often unsure how to respond and, as a result, faith communities may ignore concerning behaviors and over-react to behaviors that are developmentally normal.

Although this paper cannot fully address the complexities involved in the sexual behaviors of children, it can provide an overview of the subject and offer guidance for obtaining additional information. To this end, this paper introduces the reader to quality resources that can help faith leaders when addressing this issue. The paper also provides an overview of normal and concerning sexual behaviors among children. When the behaviors are concerning, guidance on appropriate interventions or treatment is offered. Finally, there is a discussion of factors to consider when a juvenile has been removed from his or her home because of sexual misconduct and is being re-integrated into a home or church.

The critical importance of accessing quality resources and expertise

When confronted with the sexual behaviors of youth, faith leaders and the families they serve should take two critical steps. First, it is important to review quality information about the sexual behaviors of children. The National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth (NCSBY),² the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN),³ and the American Academy of Pedi-

We are often unsure how to respond and, as a result, faith communities may ignore concerning behaviors and over-react to behaviors that are developmentally normal.

atric⁴ have all published free, online materials that can help in determining when a behavior is concerning enough to warrant professional intervention. The SMART⁵ Office of the United States Department of Justice has published a free, online summary of the peer reviewed studies on juveniles who commit sexual offenses and evidence-based treatment.⁶

Second it is important to consult one or more experts on the sexual behaviors of youth. Reaching out to hospitals that are part of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network or Child Advocacy Centers⁷ accredited by the National Children's Alliance⁸ are good places to start; they can likely direct you to an expert in this area who can assist a faith leader or family struggling with this issue. Indeed, faith leaders should make these contacts long before a crisis arises so that when concerning behaviors present themselves, a list of referrals to area experts is readily at hand.

(last visited March 29, 2018).

4. Nancy D. Kellogg, "Clinical Report—The Evaluation of Sexual Behaviors in Children," *Pediatrics* 124 (2009): 992–998, available online at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/124/3/992> (last visited March 29, 2018).

5. SMART stands for Office of the Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking.

6. The literature review is called the "Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative" and can be accessed online at: <https://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/index.html>

7. Nancy Chandler, "Children's Advocacy Centers: Making a Difference One Child at a Time," *Hamline Journal of Public Law & Policy* 28 (2006): 315–337.

8. To find an accredited Child Advocacy Center in your state, visit the National Children's Alliance website at: <http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/> (last visited March 29, 2018).

1. Victor I. Vieth is the president of the Academy on Violence & Abuse, the senior director and founder of the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center, and previously served as executive director of the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse.

2. For additional information, visit the NCSBY website at: <http://www.ncsby.org/> (last visited March 29, 2018).

3. See "Sexual Development and Behavior in Children," *The National Child Traumatic Stress Network*, available online at: http://nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/caring/sexualdevelopmentandbehavior.pdf

Developmentally appropriate sexual behaviors: pre-adolescence

More than half of children will engage in sexualized behavior before they turn thirteen with some research placing this number much higher.⁹ Most of this behavior is “informational gathering” as children “explore each other’s bodies by looking and touching (e.g., playing doctor) or exploring gender roles (e.g., playing house).”¹⁰ Adults see sexual activity based on our grown-up experiences of sexual desire and orgasm-seeking behaviors. While pre-teens may be motivated by more adult-like desires, “this is rarely true of young children.”¹¹ Instead, these children view private parts as a “mystery and secrecy that inspires them to discover what they are all about.”¹²

Children below the age of four

Applying this knowledge to children less than four years of age, all of these behaviors would be developmentally normal:

- Exploring/touching private parts in private or public
- Rubbing private parts with a hand or against objects
- Showing private parts to others
- Trying to touch a mother’s or another woman’s breast
- Removing clothes and wanting to be naked
- Attempting to see others undressing
- Talking to same-aged children about “poop” and “pee”¹³

If, then, a toddler likes to run through the house naked after a bath or peeks in on a parent when they are showering, or giggles when talking about body functions with other children at his pre-school, there is little to be alarmed about.

Children ages four to six

For children four to six years of age, the NCTSN finds all of these behaviors to be common and developmentally normal:

- Purposely touching his or her genitals
- Attempting to see others naked or undressing
- Mimicking dating behavior (kissing, holding hands)
- Talking about private parts and using “naughty” words they don’t understand
- Exploring private parts with children their own age (playing doctor, “show me yours, I’ll show you mine”)¹⁴

Assume, for example, an adult walks into a room and discovers

three girls, all five years of age, with their panties off and giggling at and pointing toward and touching each other’s genitals.¹⁵ Applying the research above, an appropriate response would simply be to tell the children that it’s not a good idea to touch each other’s private parts and to inform them that others are not allowed to touch their private parts.¹⁶ With this simple education, the behavior is unlikely to repeat itself.

As another example, assume a kindergartner signed up for tee-ball gets a protective cup and comments “I’m so glad we got the cup, you have to protective the family jewels.” In all likelihood, the child has no idea what he is talking about but has likely heard a phrase from television or an older youth and is simply repeating something he sees as “naughty” or perhaps funny. Asking what the child meant, and then answering any questions he may have about the cup is the proper parental approach.

Children seven to twelve years of age

For children in this age range, the NCTSN concludes the following behaviors are common and normal:

- Masturbation but usually in private
- Playing games with children their own age (truth or dare, playing family, playing boyfriend/girlfriend)
- Looking at pictures of naked people
- Viewing/listening to sexual content in media (TV, movies, games, the Internet, music)
- Wanting more privacy (when undressing, etc.)
- Beginnings of sexual attraction to peers

If, then, a youth minister walks in on two pre-teens exploring each other’s bodies, he or she has likely walked in on developmentally normal behavior. In this instance, it would be appropriate to discuss with them the responsibilities of sexual activities, to let them know they are too young to be making babies, and to facilitate a healthy dialogue with their parents.¹⁷

Concerning sexual behaviors: pre-adolescence

Although it is true that most children exhibit sexual behaviors, some behaviors are less common and may pose concerns. In a study of 1,142 non-abused children, researchers found the following behaviors were relatively uncommon:

- Placing child’s mouth on a sex part
- Asking to engage in sex acts
- Masturbating with object
- Inserting objects in vagina/anus
- Imitating intercourse
- Making sexual sounds
- French kissing

15. Johnson, *Understanding Children’s Sexual Behaviors: What’s Natural and Healthy*, 8.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

9. Kellogg, “Clinical Report—The Evaluation of Sexual Behaviors in Children,” 992.

10. Toni Cavanaugh Johnson, *Understanding Children’s Sexual Behaviors: What’s Natural and Healthy* (2018), 1.

11. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

12. *Ibid.*, 6.

13. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Sexual Development and Behavior in Children,” table 1.

14. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Sexual Development and Behavior in Children,” table 1.

- Asking to watch sexually explicit behavior
- Imitating sexual behavior with dolls¹⁸

In one case, a school teacher at a Christian school walked into a bathroom and discovered a seven-year-old girl performing cunnilingus on a five-year-old girl who was pinned against a wall with tears running down her cheeks.¹⁹ Applying the research above, this would be an unusual sexual act for a child so young. In addition to the explicit nature of the act, the two-year age difference and the appearance of some force (pinned against the wall) as well as harm (tears running down a cheek) raise a number of valid concerns.

In another case, a five-year-old boy was observed going up to girls on a playground and asking them to “suck my dick.” When other children declined, he punched them in the stomach. The explicit request, combined with violence is unusual and concerning.

Although concerning sexual behaviors can be attributable to sexual abuse,²⁰ there are also multiple other factors that could be driving the behavior including exposure to pornography and observing adults engaged in sexual activity.²¹ If these other potential sources of unusual sexual knowledge are eliminated, the possibility of sexual abuse increases.²²

In cases of concerning sexual behavior such as the two cases described above, the National District Attorneys Association recommends screening for the possibility of sexual abuse, noting “the younger the child is in age, the more likely he is mimicking behavior seen or repeating behaviors the child has experienced.”²³ Young children exhibiting concerning behaviors should not be charged as juvenile delinquents but if parents are unwilling to provide treatment or other necessary services, the government may consider filing a child protection petition to compel the parents to do so.²⁴

Developmentally appropriate sexual behaviors: adolescence and teenage years

In her summary of the literature, Dr. Anna Salter notes the following behaviors to be common and normal among adolescents and teenagers:

- Sexually explicit talk with peers

- Obscenity/jokes within cultural norm
- Sexual innuendo, flirting, courtship
- Interest in erotica
- Solitary or mutual masturbation
- Hugging, kissing, holding hands
- Foreplay, even intercourse with consenting partner²⁵

In describing these behaviors as normal, this is not to say that parents or faith leaders should not intervene when young people are making inappropriate comments or engaging in sexual activity. Obviously, young people need moral training and assistance in making sexual decisions. This is simply to say that the behaviors above do not warrant a call to the authorities or professional intervention.

Developmentally inappropriate/deviant sexual behaviors: adolescence and teenage years

In terms of inappropriate sexual behaviors among adolescents and teens, Dr. Anna Salter categorizes three levels of deviance with each level becoming increasingly problematic.

Deviant level one

The lowest level of deviance but which nonetheless presents concerns includes the following behaviors:

- High degree of preoccupation/anxiety
- Frequent use of porn/sex shows
- Indiscriminate sexual acts with multiple partners
- Sexually aggressive remarks, obscenities, graffiti
- Embarrassing others with sexual remarks
- Pulling skirts up, pants down
- Violating others space²⁶

At a minimum, behaviors of this type should not be ignored and they are worthy of a conversation in the hope of providing appropriate boundaries. If the behaviors are extreme, some professional intervention may be appropriate. Some of the behaviors, such as indiscriminate acts with multiple sexual partners are associated with having endured trauma.²⁷

18. John E.B. Myers, *Myers on Evidence in Child, Domestic and Elder Abuse Cases* (New York, N.Y.: Aspen Publishers, 2005), 383; William N. Friedrich, Patricia Grambsch, Daniel Broughton, James Kuipers, and Robert L. Beilke, “Normative Sexual Behavior in Children,” *Pediatrics* 88 (1991): 456–464.

19. This is a case the author consulted on.

20. Kathleen Coulborn Faller, *Understanding and Assessing Child Sexual Maltreatment*, Second Edition (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2003), 182; William N. Friedrich, “Sexual Victimization and Sexual Behavior in Children: A Review of Recent Literature,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 17 (1993): 59–66.

21. Myers, *Myers on Evidence in Child, Domestic and Elder Abuse Cases*, 383.

22. Ibid.

23. Ann Ratnayake, “Juvenile Sex Offenses: Finding Justice,” *Update* 23(9) (National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, 2013).

24. Ibid.

25. Anna Salter, “Normal and Deviant Adolescent Sexual Behavior,” adapted from the work of Dr. Robert Prentky & Dr. William Friedrich, available online at: <http://www.annasalter.com/annasalter/Slides.html> (last accessed March 29, 2018).

26. Ibid.

27. Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, eds. Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermetten, and Clare Pain (Cambridge Medicine, 2010), 77.

Deviant level two

The middle tier of deviance includes these behaviors:

- Compulsive masturbation
- Degradation/humiliation of self or others with sexual overtones
- Attempting to expose genitals of others
- Chronic preoccupation with sexually aggressive porn
- Sexually explicit conversation with young children
- Sexually explicit threats
- Obscene phone calls²⁸

In one case, a teenager was hospitalized after tying a fish line so tightly around his nipples it would take surgery to remove. In therapy, the child shared the only way he could be sexually aroused is to harm or humiliate himself. As the case progressed, it was discovered the child had been sexually abused by seventeen different adults and he himself had sexually abused multiple younger children.²⁹ All of these revelations were made possible because professionals realized the concerning sexual behavior of the teenager at the outset and sought professional help.

Deviant level three

The most egregious level of adolescent and teenager deviance includes these behaviors:

- Genital touching without permission
- Sexual contact with significant age difference
- Forced sexual contact or penetration (vaginal/anal)
- Sexual contact with animals
- Causing genital injury to others³⁰

The sexual behavior described above would be a crime if committed by an adult and warrants a delinquency petition and full assessment.³¹ To get a sense of these types of cases, consider the following three examples.

First, a fourteen-year-old boy has been warned at a church summer camp about sexually aggressive remarks directed toward a girl his age. When he walks past the girl at a youth activity, he takes a pencil and forcibly pokes the girl's breast, causing her pain.³² There are multiple concerning factors in this scenario. The child's remarks were sexually aggressive and, when warned, he elevates the conduct by promptly committing a sexual assault. The church must take immediate action to protect the victim, report the conduct to the authorities, and insist on a complete assessment that will aid in determining how best the church can

28. Anna Salter, "Adolescent Sex Offenders," available online at: <http://www.annasalter.com/annasalter/Slides.html> (last accessed March 29, 2018).

29. This is a case the author consulted on.

30. Salter, "Adolescent Sex Offenders."

31. Victor I. Vieth, "When the Child Abuser is a Child: Investigating, Prosecuting and Treating Juvenile Sex Offenders in the New Millennium," *Hamline Law Review* 25 (2001): 47–78.

32. This is a scenario the author consulted on.

Determining the cause of sexually abusive behaviors is difficult. Factors contributing to this behavior range from sexual curiosity to serious mental health problems.

work with the youth going forward.

Second, four sixteen-year-old boys from the local Christian school basketball team are at a hotel for a basketball tournament. Three of the boys gang up on a boy who is often picked on. While two of the boys hold him to the ground, the third boy attempts to "tea bag" him by putting his testicles in the boy's mouth. The victim's yelling causes the basketball coach to walk into the room.³³ Obviously, this is a serious sexual assault that warrants immediate action. The victim needs to be protected and supported. The offenders need to be reported to the authorities and, working with the authorities, the church can decide how best to support the assessment and treatment of the offenders.

Third, a church member has a thirteen-year-old son who has invited several of his teenage friends to his house. The boy persuades his younger sister, only six years old, to lie down on the bathroom floor with her pants and panties off. He promises he won't let his friends into the bathroom but he promptly breaks this promise and he and his friends have a "good laugh" about the matter.³⁴ Without training, this scenario could easily be dismissed as a silly prank. However, there are numerous factors of concern—the significant age difference, the degree of planning involved, and the intentionality of humiliating his sister in a way that has sexual overtones.

What causes adolescents and teenagers to commit sexual offenses?

Determining the cause of sexually abusive behaviors is difficult. Factors contributing to this behavior range from sexual curiosity to serious mental health problems.³⁵ According to the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers:

Adolescent sexually abusive behavior is influenced by a variety of risk and protective factors occurring at the individual youth, family, peer, school, neighborhood and community levels. Consequently, policies and practices should include evaluations that consider a range of

33. This is a scenario the author consulted on.

34. This scenario is modified from a case scenario contained in Vernon R. Wiehe, *Sibling Abuse: Hidden Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Trauma* (Lexington Books: Lexington, Ma., 1990), 55.

35. David Finkelhor, Richard Ormrod, and Mark Chaffin, "Juveniles who Commit Sex Offenses Against Minors," *OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (December 2009).

potentially relevant factors that might be related to the development or possibility of repeated sexually abusive behavior in a given youth and that can guide effective intervention.³⁶

A juvenile offender's own history of sexual victimization may play a role particularly when the abuse occurs at young ages, involved multiple incidents, there was a long waiting period before reporting the abuse, and there was low level of perceived family support.³⁷ As a whole, though, a history of physical abuse or neglect has a stronger correlation to later sexual misconduct.³⁸ Keep in mind that when a child is maltreated they are often abused in multiple ways.³⁹ In a study of 667 boys and 155 girls who had committed sexual offenses, nearly all of them had "highly dysfunctional" families and high degrees of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.⁴⁰

Treatment for juveniles who commit sexual offenses

There are multiple options for treating a juvenile who has committed sexual offenses. Treatment with some support in the literature includes cognitive behavioral therapy, relapse prevention, sexual trauma therapy, and psychosocial education.⁴¹ Multisystemic Therapy (MST), which operates on the premise that individual, family, and environmental factors all play a role in sexual misconduct, has also proved effective in lowering recidivism.⁴²

Although clergy and other faith leaders cannot be expected

36. "Adolescents Who Have Engaged in Sexually Abusive Behavior: Effective Policies and Practices," adopted by the ATSA Executive Board of Directors on October 30, 2012.

37. John A. Hunter and Aurelio Jose Figueredo. "The Influence of Personality and History of Sexual Victimization in the Prediction of Juvenile Perpetrated Child Molestation," *Behavior Modification* 24 (2000): 241–263.

38. Cathy Spatz Widom and Christine Massey, "A Prospective Examination of Whether Childhood Sexual Abuse Predicts Subsequent Sexual Offending," *JAMA Pediatrics* 169 (2015), published online at: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2086458> (last accessed March 30, 2018).

39. Heather A. Turner, David Finkelhor, and Richard Omrod, "Poly-victimization in a National Sample of Children and Youth," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 38 (2010): 323–330; David Finkelhor, Richard K. Omrod, Heather A. Turner, "Poly-victimization: A Neglected Component in Child Victimization," *31 Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect* 31 (2007): 7–26.

40. Deborah J. Cavanaugh, Ann Pimental, and Robert Prentky, "A Descriptive Study of Sexually Abusive Boys and Girls—Externalizing Behaviors," in B.K. Schwartz, ed., *The Sex Offender: Offender Evaluation and Program Strategies*, vol. VI (Kingston, N.J.: Civic Research Institute 2008), 12-1–12-21.

41. Lorraine R. Reitzel and Joyce L. Carbonell, "The Effectiveness of Sexual Offender Treatment for Juveniles as Measured by Recidivism: A Meta-analysis," *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 18 (2006): 401–421.41

42. Elizabeth J. Letourneau, Scott W. Henggeler, Charles M. Borduin, Paul A. Schewe, Michael R. McCart, Jason E. Chapman, and Lisa Saldana, "Multisystemic Therapy for Juvenile Sexual Offenders: 1-year Results From a Randomized Effectiveness Trial." *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23 (2009): 89–102.

Although clergy and other faith leaders cannot be expected to know the nuances of these various treatment options, they can advise parents to seek treatment that is supported by research.

to know the nuances of these various treatment options, they can advise parents to seek treatment that is supported by research. Clergy can also reach out to experts in the field for guidance in working with a juvenile in the congregation who has committed a sexual offense (see resource section above). When a juvenile has committed a serious offense and is being brought back into the church, faith leaders should require appropriate releases be signed so that they can discuss with the juvenile's treatment team his or her risk for re-offense and what type of safety plan is warranted.

The risk of re-offense

Since recidivism is measured by whether or not an offender gets caught again, the actual rate of an adult or juvenile offender's recidivism is always higher than the numbers reported by researchers. This is because, in all likelihood, some offenders commit additional offenses but don't get caught. Nonetheless, it is encouraging that juveniles who commit sexual offenses have relatively low rates of recidivism (7-13 percent). We also know from research conducted at ten- and twenty-year intervals that juveniles who underwent some form of evidence-based treatment, had lower rates of recidivism than did juvenile offenders who did not receive any treatment.⁴³ This is true whether recidivism was measured by another charge for a sexual offense, a non-sexual violent charge, or a charge for any offense at all.⁴⁴

There are some factors that increase or decrease the risk a juvenile will commit another sexual offense. The following factors elevate the risk of recidivism:

- Deviant sexual fantasies with an interest in prepubescent children and/or sexual violence
- Committing sex crimes despite prior charges or convictions
- Multiple victims
- Targeting strangers
- Social isolation/unwillingness or inability to form peer relationships

43. James R. Worling, Ariel Littlejohn, and David Bookalam, (2010) "20-year Follow-up Study of Specialized Treatment for Adolescents Who Offended Sexually," *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 28 (2010): 46–57; James R. Worling and T. Curwen, "Adolescent Sexual Offender Recidivism: Success of Specialized Treatment and Implications for Risk Prediction," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 24 (2000): 965–982.

44. Ibid.

- Unwillingness/inability to participate in treatment⁴⁵

On the other hand, these factors are associated with a lower risk of recidivism:

- Positive family functioning
- Positive peer social groups
- Availability of supportive adults
- Commitment to school
- Pro-social, non-criminal attitudes⁴⁶

The church can play a role in lowering the risk of recidivism by helping a child develop healthy adult relationships and positive peer groups, and by providing appropriate supervision. To the extent a child's personal history of trauma has played a role in sexual misconduct,⁴⁷ developing a healthy spirituality can lower the effects of an abusive childhood.⁴⁸

Re-uniting siblings when there has been a sexual offense

When a child commits a sexual offense against a brother or sister which results in a removal from the home, the issue of reunification is complex. At a minimum, the child committing the offense must have made meaningful progress in treatment as determined by the treatment provider.⁴⁹ Assuming this threshold is met, an appropriate safety plan can be considered that includes the following elements:

- Close supervision of the child committing the offense
- Prohibiting the child from babysitting or supervisory authority
- Prohibiting the child from bathing or dressing other children
- Requiring the child to be fully dressed in public areas of home
- Prohibiting the child from accessing sexualized materials

45. Ann Ratnayake, "Juvenile Sex Offenses: Finding Justice," *Update 23(9)* (National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, 2013).

46. "Adolescents Who Have Engaged in Sexually Abusive Behavior: Effective Policies and Practices," adopted by the ATSA Executive Board of Directors on October 30, 2012.

47. Jill S. Levenson, Gwenda M. Willis, and David S. Prescott, "Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Lives of Male Sex Offenders: Implications for Trauma-Informed Care," *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 1–20 (2014).

48. Katia, G. Reinert, Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Karen Bandeen-Roche, Jerry W. Lee, and Sarah Szanton, "The Role of Religious Involvement in the Relationship Between Early Trauma and Health Outcomes Among Adult Survivors," *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma* (2016) 9: 231, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-015-0067-7>; Thema Bryant-Davis, Monica U. Ellis, Elizabeth Burke-Maynard, Nathan Moon, Pamela A. Counts, and Gera Anderson, "Religiosity, Spirituality, and Trauma Recovery in the Lives of Children and Adolescents," *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice* 43 (2012): 306–314; Donald F. Walker, Henri Webb Reid, Tiffany O'Neill, and Lindsay Brown, "Changes in Personal Religion/Spirituality During and After Childhood Abuse: A Review and Synthesis," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice & Policy* 1 (2009): 130–145.

49. Barbara L. Bonner, Ph.D., *Taking Action: Support for Families of Adolescents with Illegal Sexual Behavior* (Safer Society Press, 2009), 33–38.

Even if the child who has committed the offense has progressed in treatment and a strong safety plan is in place, the needs of the victim must always come first.

- Prohibiting the child from sharing a room with younger children
- Prohibiting the child from going into other children's rooms
- Prohibiting the child from hugs or kisses with victim which, among other things, may bring back memories of the sexual assault
- Prohibiting horseplay, wrestling or tickling with children⁵⁰

Even if the child who has committed the offense has progressed in treatment and a strong safety plan is in place, the needs of the victim must always come first. Accordingly, he or she must be able to emotionally handle the return of the offender to the home. If this is not the case, the pastor or other faith leader can help a juvenile who has sexually offended in understanding that even with repentance and improved behavior, there are earthly consequences for our conduct and that putting the needs of those we have harmed first is a critical lesson to master.

Conclusion

When Hagar's child faced death in the desert, we are told that God "heard the boy crying" and intervened, staying "with the boy as he grew up."⁵¹ In applying this lesson to the sexual behaviors of children, faith leaders today must be with the children who are sexually abused by siblings or other children to make sure that they are protected and their needs fully met. Faith leaders must also be with the children exhibiting sexual behavior problems or committing sexual assaults in the hope that they will be held accountable for their conduct, appropriately treated, and grow up to be healthy adults.

50. Ibid.

51. Gen 21:14–21 (NIV).

Toxic Theology: A Pastoral Response to Bible Passages Often Used to Justify the Abuse of Children or Prevent Them from Seeking Care

Troy Troftgruben¹

“To invoke God to justify violence against the innocent is not an act of sanctity but of sacrilege. It is a kind of blasphemy. It is to take God’s name in vain.”²

These words, from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, appear in a book addressing religious violence and extremism. They apply no less to the abuse of children in the name of God or Christ.

Many of the worst forms of child abuse are not justified by apathy or indifference as much as by scripture and religious grounds. An example is the case of Roy Moore, an Alabama senator accused in 2017 of multiple accounts of sexually molesting minors. Alabama State Auditor Jim Ziegler argued that, if true, Moore’s actions were not a big deal because the Bible features marriages across significant age gaps in Jesus’ family (Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary). Therefore, “There’s just nothing immoral or illegal here. Maybe just a little bit unusual.”³

This brief essay cannot dismantle the countless ways scripture has been used to justify violent and unjust activities against children. But it will briefly address three common offenders, showing how these interpretations run against the spirit of scripture itself.

Proverbs and corporal punishment

Ironically, Proverbs condemns physical violence between people, but recommends physical punishment to control household members.⁴ Many passages endorse forms of corporal punishment of children: “Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them” (13:24).⁵ More than

Many of the worst forms of child abuse are not justified by apathy or indifference as much as by scripture and religious grounds.

anything else, these verses show some radically different cultural norms at work in Ancient Israel regarding physical discipline, effective instruction, and the nature of children.

Like virtually all other cultures in the ancient world, the authors of Proverbs (here called “the sages”) drew no distinctions between corporal and non-corporal discipline.⁶ They felt no need to, since they believed physical discipline was a constructive and effective teacher—and not just for children: “Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence” (19:25a); “Blows that wound cleanse away evil; beatings make clean the innermost parts” (20:30); “Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol” (23:13–14). The sages, in fact, believed words alone could not bring about effective discipline the way corporal punishment could: “By mere words servants are not disciplined, for though they understand, they will not give heed” (29:19). All these proverbs sought the ultimate goal, not of inflicting pain, but of nurturing inward character and maturity.

Related to this are critical assumptions about children that were widespread in antiquity. The ancients valued childhood very little, esteeming children primarily for their potential to grow into contributing adults. Children were irrational creatures, needing firm and deliberate discipline if they were to develop rationality and self-control. For this reason, children typically began work and apprenticeship as early as possible, typically by five to seven years old.⁷ And so, Prov 22:15 observes “Folly is bound up in the

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

6. See R. D. Branson, “*yāsār; mūsār*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry; trans. David E. Green; 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 6:127–134.

7. Lynn H. Cohick, “Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World,” in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural*,

1. Associate Professor of New Testament, Wartburg Theological Seminary.

2. Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (New York: Schocken Books, 2015) 5.

3. Aisha Sultan, “Don’t Use Bible Stories to Justify Child Molestation,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Nov 10, 2017). Available at http://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/parenting/aisha-sultan/aisha-sultan-dont-use-bible-stories-to-justify-child/article_7fa83c62-bded-5aea-a4e4-04b5308d0dab.html.

4. Pointed out by Claudia V. Camp and Carole R. Fontaine, “Proverbs Study Notes,” *Harper-Collins Study Bible* Wayne A. Meeks, ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993) 960.

5. See also Prov 13:1; 19:18; 20:30; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15, 17. The phrase “Spare the rod, spoil the child” does not appear in scripture (appearing first in Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*), but may well have been based on Prov 13:24. All scripture quotations in this essay are from the

heart of a boy, but the rod of discipline drives it far away,” because the sages fundamentally believed any child, if left undisciplined, would wind up a disgraceful, irrational fool.

As may be clear, the sayings of Proverbs are products of their time (see also Sirach 7:23–24; 30:1–13). Michael V. Fox observes, “Ancient wisdom commended child beating with some zeal.”⁸ We, however, do not. The ancients cherished basic assumptions about physical discipline and children that today we simply do not share. They knew nothing about modern developmental psychology or the negative consequences (and traumas) associated with physical punishment—which we now know. Theirs was a different era, where child mortality rates were high (nearly 50 percent), vast economic discrepancies made poverty pervasive, and appreciation for the lived experiences of children was simply not a priority.

Most importantly, these verses do not necessarily aim to emphasize the enduring value of corporal punishment. Instead, they highlight the importance of intentional instruction for children in ways that yield maturity, character, and wisdom. In fact, the whole of Proverbs is patterned after the metaphor of parents instructing children in the ways of wisdom (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; etc.). The goal of this wisdom literature is holistic and spiritual maturity, not specific models of physical discipline. Given this, models of discipline—in any era—that are *more* effective than corporal punishment truly achieve the goals of Proverbs best of all.⁹

To this day, there are interpreters who read Proverbs—and all of scripture—as endorsing corporal punishment,¹⁰ as well as an increasing number of those who take issue with this reading.¹¹ Meanwhile, debate rages on regarding the place of corporal punishment in effective parenting,¹² while studies increasingly show

Social, and Historical Contexts, eds. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 179–187.

8. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, Anchor Bible 18B, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 571.

9. See William J. Webb, *Corporal Punishment in the Bible: A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

10. For instance, Michael and Debi Pearl, *To Train Up a Child: Child Training for the 21st Century* (No Greater Joy Ministries, 2015), ch. 9; James C. Dobson, “Questions and Answers about Corporal Punishment and the Strong-Willed Child,” Dobson Digital Library, available at <http://www.dobsonlibrary.com/resource/article/9e6c1b33-b341-4617-aa11-70c9744fdf11>; Albert Mohler, “Should Spanking Be Banned? Parental Authority Under Assault,” (June 22, 2004), available at <https://albertmohler.com/2004/06/22/should-spanking-be-banned-parental-authority-under-assault/>. See also Paul D. Wegner, “Discipline in the Book of Proverbs: ‘To Spank or Not to Spank?’” *JETS* 48.4 (Dec 2005): 715–732.

11. For instance, “Thou Shalt Not Abuse: Misuse of Biblical Teaching on Spanking Can Have Deadly Consequences,” *Christianity Today* 26.1 (Jan 2012): 55; William J. Webb, *Corporal Punishment in the Bible*; John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible’s Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) chs. 15–20; Bruce and Carolyn Gillette, “Faithfully Disciplining our Children,” *Church & Society* 94.3 (Jan–Feb 2004): 45–49; Randall Heskett, “Proverbs 23:13–14,” *Interpretation* 55.2 (April 2001): 181–184.

12. John P. Hoffman, Christopher G. Ellison, and John P. Bartkowski, “Conservative Protestantism and Attitudes Toward Corporal

A faithful reading calls for thoughtful evaluation (and reevaluation) of how best to instruct the young and untrained in the path of wisdom, in ways that are effective, holistic, and appropriate for our context.

it is not only unnecessary, but heavily associated with negative consequences and abusive practices.¹³ But in view of the ultimate goals of Proverbs—and all of Israel’s wisdom literature—it seems clear: a faithful reading of these passages (and all of scripture) does *not* require endorsing corporal punishment. Instead, a faithful reading calls for thoughtful evaluation (and reevaluation) of how best to instruct the young and untrained in the path of wisdom, in ways that are effective, holistic, and appropriate for our context. Forms of corporal punishment were typically part of that process in Ancient Israel, but that neither means nor requires they are appropriate for contexts in the twenty-first century.

The studies of an increasing number of psychologists, medical providers, and parenting professionals today regarding corporal punishment beg the question: because it appears in scripture, does that mean it is God’s will for all times and places? In my estimation, the sages who wrote Proverbs cared far more about spiritual maturity than corporal punishment, viewing the latter as merely a means (and a disposable one, at that) to a greater end. This gives us biblical grounds to leave corporal punishment behind for the sake of a more faithful scripture interpretation, and more effective and less problematic approaches to parenting and instruction.

Withholding medical care from children

Throughout scripture, evaluations of professional medical care are mixed, and for understandable reasons. In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), healing practices take place in homes (2 Sam 12:15–23) with physicians rarely appearing—and when they do, they are viewed negatively (2 Chron 16:12; Job 13:4; cf. Isa 38:21; Jer 8:22). But among ancient Israelites, the kinds of professional

Punishment,” *Social Science Research* 63 (2017): 81–94; Henry Enten, “Americans’ Opinions On Spanking Vary By Party, Race, Region And Religion,” *FiveThirtyEight* (Sept 14, 2014), available at <https://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/americans-opinions-onspanking-vary-by-party-race-region-and-religion/>.

13. Victor Vieth, “Augustine, Luther, and Solomon: Providing Pastoral Guidance to Parents on the Corporal Punishment of Children,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44.3 (July 2017): 25–33; Elizabeth T. Gershoff and Andrew Grogran-Kaylor, “Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 30.4 (2016): 453–469; Adam J. Zolotov et al., “Speak Softly—and Forget the Stick: Corporal Punishment and Child Physical Abuse,” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 35 (2008): 364–365.

medical care so familiar to today's world simply did not exist. For them, the body was a mystery known only to God. These evaluations reflect mainstream biases against Greek medicine throughout antiquity, not just in ancient Israel.¹⁴

In later centuries, Jewish thinkers embraced professional medical care with increased openness: "Honor physicians for their services, for the Lord created them" (Sir 38:1); "The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and the sensible will not despise them" (v. 4).¹⁵ By the time of New Testament writings, physicians were relatively common (Mark 2:17; Luke 4:23). Still, the concept of "healing" overlapped significantly with notions of divine intervention, as seen in the blurring of language for "healing" and "saving" (doctors were called "saviors," and holy men "doctors"), as well as in how prevalently healings were associated with holy men.¹⁶ Unstandardized as it was, medical care was still expensive and prone to be ineffective (Mark 5:26). However, medicinal practices were embraced by several New Testament authors (1 Tim 5:23; Rev 3:18; cf. James 5:14), and nowhere explicitly rejected by them. A physician is counted among Paul's ministry colleagues (Col 4:14),¹⁷ and several New Testament passages associate basic medical treatment with hospitality in homes (10:34–35; Acts 16:33–34; see also Luke 4:23).

Given the historical realities of professional medical care in the ancient world, it is not surprising that scripture lacks a rousing theological endorsement to go to the doctor. There were very different stages in the development of modern medicine. Still, several New Testament writings embrace effective forms of medical care, without at all insinuating it was antagonistic to faith in God. More to the point, the New Testament, taken as a whole, does not view faith and medicine—as well as the practices associated with each—as conflicting things. In varying degrees, the authors of scripture increasingly embraced medicinal developments as good gifts of God for the care and well-being of creation (James 1:17).

To this day, Christians have perennially been tempted to view advancements in professional medical care as things contradictory to reliance on God—perhaps even as meddling in the affairs of God. On these grounds, many non-mainstream church bodies today—such as Christian Science and Jehovah's Witnesses—condemn receiving certain forms of professional medical care as

14. On this, see Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 2d ed.; Sciences of Antiquity, (London: Routledge, 2012).

15. See 38:1–15; Philo, *Leg.* 3.226; *Congr.* 53; Josephus, *Life* 404; *Ant.* 4.277.

16. E.g., Hanina ben Dosa (first cent. CE), the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana (first cent. CE), Emperor Vespasian (Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81), Emperor Augustus (Philo, *Legat.* 144–45), and King Solomon (Josephus *Ant.* 8.44–49). Galen (second cent. AD), whose medical theories and practices were practiced down to the seventeenth century, gave one of his writings the title *That the Best Physician is also a Philosopher*, showing how blurred the categories were. See Wendy Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999); Joel B. Green, "Healing and Healthcare," in *The World of the New Testament*, 330–341.

17. "Luke, the beloved physician," who is traditionally credited with authoring the Third Gospel and Acts.

As Luke's New Testament writings show, many early Christians saw basic medical care (like bandaging wounds) as an integral part of the ministry of hospitality.

antithetical to their faith.¹⁸ And when it comes to refusing children these basic forms of care, such practices are not merely alternative or counter-cultural, they are abusive.

As Luke's New Testament writings show, many early Christians saw basic medical care (like bandaging wounds) as an integral part of the ministry of hospitality (Luke 10:34–35; Acts 16:33–34). This was part of what it means to be a "neighbor" to those in need (Luke 10:36–37). Given this, extending basic medical care is a fundamental way to continue love for neighbor and the healing ministry of Jesus. In the centuries shortly after New Testament times, Christians took it upon themselves to nurse the sick and take in exposed infants, not because they were "nice" things to do, but in order to live out a calling to emulate the healing ministry of Jesus in the face of sickness and death.¹⁹ To this day, ministry organizations of various kinds carry on healing ministries for the same reasons, to extend the healing ministry of Jesus in ways made possible through the tools of modern medicine.

What makes refusing children modern medical care abusive is that they have no voice in the decision-making. It is not their faith and reasoning that motivate the refusal, but their guardians'. Meanwhile, the Jesus we find in scripture reacted indignantly to adults who refused children basic blessings (Mark 10:13–16). Jesus also warned strictly against placing any stumbling blocks before "these little ones who believe in me," likening it to a fate worse than being attached to a millstone flung into the sea (Mark 9:42–43; Matt 18:6–7).

In antiquity and today, children were and are the most vulnerable demographic in the world. To deny them modern extensions of Jesus' healing ministry, it seems to me, is to lay down stumbling blocks before a people most dear to the heart of Jesus.

Resistance to professional mental health resources

Many child abuse survivors, especially in adulthood, have significant needs to live healthy and productive lives. But they also encounter resistance from faith leaders and communities against using professional mental health resources such as psychologists and counselors.

18. Paul A. Offit names over twenty in *Bad Faith: When Religious Belief Undermines Modern Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

19. See Amanda Potterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Hector Avalos, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).

The resistance is fueled by arguments similar to those against receiving medical care (see section II). But two additional challenges surround mental health services: widespread social stigmas and greater perceived overlap with spiritual care. As a result, many people think of mental health challenges as individualistic problems, perhaps even spiritual ones, to be addressed without professional assistance. A 2013 survey of over 1,000 Americans, for example, showed 35 percent of them—and 48 percent of Evangelical Christians—agreed with the statement: “With just Bible study and prayer, ALONE, people with serious mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia could overcome mental illness.”²⁰

Some Christians use instances from Jesus’ ministry to support resistance to mental health resources. For example, in the Gospels, some of those whom Jesus healed display symptoms shared by forms of mental illness known today.²¹ Based on healing stories such as these, some believe mental illnesses today are better addressed by spiritual than psychological resources. But the fact that first-century people—including the authors of scripture—did not differentiate between the spiritual and the psychological does not make it constructive for us to do the same. In fact, conflating the two can be remarkably harmful.

Modern mental health practices have shown not only the value of differentiating mental illnesses from those who suffer from them, but also the dangers of mislabeling mental illnesses. To demonize (or sanctify) mental health conditions can be not only unproductive, but also damaging. For instance, a pastor friend of mine once witnessed a day-long prayer vigil around a young woman, with the hopes of exorcising an “evil spirit” from her. She was later diagnosed with schizophrenia. She still refers to the vigil as a traumatic experience.

Others interpret scriptural encouragements to “counsel” or “instruct” one another (e.g., Rom 15:14) as endorsing the notion that the spiritual resources of a Christian community are all that is necessary to facilitate mental health and healing.²² Some underlying assumptions here may be that prayer should initiate all forms of true healing (see Mark 9:29), that scripture is sufficient for all kinds of instruction (see 2 Tim 3:16–17), that true healing can take place only within

20. John Peteet, “The Interface between Religion/Spirituality and Mental Health,” 1. Essay featured by the American Psychiatric Association: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/faith-community-partnership>. Accessed January 24, 2018. Capitalization original.

21. E.g., a boy with convulsions (Mark 9:14–29), about whom Jesus says, “This kind [of demon] can come out only through prayer” (v. 29). See also Mark 5:1–20. Some argue these conditions were, in fact, psychological conditions interpreted in spiritual terms by the ancients. See David George Reese, “Demons,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 2:138–142 (esp. 142).

22. Romans 15:14 is often cited: “I, for my part, am convinced, my sisters and brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.” See also 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Cor 4:14.

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the context of Christian community (see James 5:14–15), or that only Christians can know what true mental health looks like.²³

However, although these scripture passages give significant roles to spiritual resources for healing and instruction, none of these passages explicitly bars believers from pursuing other resources in addition.²⁴ These passages aimed primarily to emphasize the healing value of spiritual resources (prayer, scripture, inter-community counsel)—not necessarily to advise how to cure specific instances of complex mental trauma. Scriptural writings naturally emphasize the value of spiritual resources, and without necessarily questioning—or addressing—the worth of modern mental health resources. In short, valuing the healing power of spiritual resources by no means requires an antagonism against the assistance of mental health professionals.

Related to this is the concern that some Christians have, that professional mental health practices do not appreciate the ethics and ideals of Christian spirituality. The concern is that these services are fundamentally “secular,” grounded in an alternative worldview, and potentially antagonistic to religious faith. Therefore, only practicing Christians can truly know what mental health in the sight of God looks like. To be fair, mental health professionals tend to be less religious than the general public, and some are suspicious of certain forms of traditional religious faith, for understandable reasons.²⁵

23. The definition of “nouthetic counseling” offered by the Institute for Nouthetic Studies fits several of these categories. See <http://www.nouthetic.org/about-ins/what-is-nouthetic-counseling>. Accessed February 13, 2018.

24. Mark 9:29 may be read as an exception (“This kind [of demon] can come out only through prayer”), but this situation assumes a diagnosis of supernatural origins, in ways not necessarily assumed for most twenty-first century maladies.

25. As John Peteet summarizes, a “mutual suspicion persists” between some Christians and mental health professionals. “A religious figure recent acknowledged that psychiatry and psychology have made

But such concerns with “secular” mental health services assume that Christians have superior access to divine wisdom and healing, and that non-Christians have nothing to teach Christians. These assumptions risk both hubris and naivete. Mental health resources can help people of all faiths avoid some serious and perennial pitfalls. Many church leaders are ill-informed about mental health resources, and their communities silent about the challenges many face. As a result, ministers often approach symptoms of mental illness through the lens of spirituality, which in turn can be prone to overemphasize individual responsibility for coming to terms with persistent trauma.²⁶

In the New Testament, both Jesus and Paul envisioned people in right relationship to God as not only right in “heart” and “soul,” but also in “mind.” The believer’s mental state is a part of loving God (Mark 12:30; Matt 22:37; Luke 10:27), as well as part of her spiritual renewal (Rom 12:1–2; see also Eph 4:23; Col 3:10). For the New Testament writings, the mind is an integral part of humanity’s whole self, making its welfare extraordinarily important to both spirituality and holistic health. In short, mental health matters profoundly to God.

Survivors of abuse—particularly abuse in childhood—have traumatic experiences and complex mental challenges far beyond what most ministers and church communities can appreciate and address. As people of faith, we need the assistance of professional health resources, as gifts of God, to help us discern and foster more authentic and lasting health among those with distinctive challenges. In standing alongside such individuals and mental health professionals, we stand together as allies for healing and wholeness in Jesus’ name.

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Conclusion

In the Postmodern Era, I have frequently heard the statement “People can use the Bible to justify anything they want.” Sadly, to some extent this is true. But in response, I argue there are not only *bad* interpretations—but *wrong* ones. And wrong interpretations deserve not only to be discredited, but in cases as these to be cast out as evil.

Where biblical interpretations endorse hatred, abuse, or violence against other human beings created in God’s image—especially the most vulnerable and powerless—such readings become acts of blasphemy. They contradict the spirit of the One who taught love for the neighbor, welcome to the child, and special divine concern for “little ones,” wherever and whoever they may be. Such acts take God’s name in vain, justifying violence against the most vulnerable among us.

useful contributions, but warned that ‘much of those disciplines are built on a faulty worldview and must be (at least partly) rejected.’ . . . For their part, many mental health professionals, who as a group are much less religious than the general public, suspect religion of being judgmental, masochistic, homophobic, misogynistic, and monolithic” (John Peteet, “Interface,” 1).

26. For example, an investigation of Bob Jones University by the Grace Institute showed an unhelpful emphasis among the school’s teachers upon individual sin as the primary cause of behavioral problems. “Final Report: For the Investigatory Review of Sexual Abuse Disclosures and Institutional Responses at Bob Jones University” (Dec 11, 2014). Online at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54596334e4b0780b44555981/t/552e9be7e4b0498e9c4b8c24/1429117927390/Bob+Jones+U+Final+Report.pdf>. Accessed January 24, 2018.

Rightside Up Again: Adolescent Girls, Theology of the Cross, and the Church's Response

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*"...and ain't I a woman?
that little man in black there say
a woman can't have as much rights as a man
cause Christ wasn't a woman
Where did your Christ come from?
From God and a woman!
If the first woman God ever made
was strong enough to turn the world
upside down, all alone
together women ought to be able to turn it
rightside up again."¹*

Adolescent girls live in a liminal space. While they are no longer children, they are also not yet adults, no matter what their bodies might say to the contrary to those now casting their gazes upon them. They are expected to be good and nice, but also to be the right kind of bad, especially for the sake of their male social media followers. Girls are told that they can do anything they want and be anything they want, yet they perceive that success for women is equated with unnatural thinness, airbrushed beauty, and constant sexiness. Even their textbooks and classes do not highlight successful, intelligent, brave women, instead continuing to focus on white men. The media is even more damaging, portraying women and girls as sexualized objects created for the pleasure and amusement of men and boys, and to the derision and judgment of other women and girls. Social media enslaves American girls, regardless of their race, class, location, or level of education.² Its pervasiveness among young women is matched only by its potential for damage upon their hearts, minds, and bodies. Young men are also in grave danger, for they are socialized to view women not as whole people, but rather as bodies. This vicious viewpoint seemingly leaves space for violence and sexual assault against girls and women. Relentlessly living within this treacherous liminal space, it is no wonder that adolescent girls, who are also in the developmentally precarious

1. Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" in *Ain't I a Woman! A Book of Women's Poetry from Around the World*, ed. Illona Linthwaite (New York: Wings Books, 1987), 129.

2. Nancy Jo Sales, *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 10.

Girls are told that they can do anything they want and be anything they want, yet they perceive that success for women is equated with unnatural thinness, airbrushed beauty, and constant sexiness.

identity formation period, are not flourishing.³

This article takes an in depth look at the incessant struggle and stress that plague adolescent girls, for it is crucial to understand the problems facing them before trying to address those issues. Indeed, much is at stake in this conversation. The stress, violence, and losses accumulated during adolescence are persistent, the effects lasting far into adulthood. Moreover, they keep girls from becoming those whom God intends them to be, showing them that they are not beloved children of their Heavenly Parent, but rather small and insignificant. American girls do not need more empty words promising that life will be easier when they grow up or telling them that they are not worth listening to and that their problems do not matter. On the contrary, adolescent girls need a theology of the cross, where God meets them in their suffering and where the crucified and risen Christ, relatable and real, offers hope in the midst of fear and sorrow. It is the work of the church to help claim a theology of the cross and connect it to strategies for helping girls develop into whole, healthy young women, ready to dream big and live into their callings as beloved children of God.

Adolescent girls

Adolescence is a time of physical, mental, and emotional development. It can leave parents wondering: "What happened to my little girl?" as they see their energetic, loquacious, and outdoor-loving eight-year-old shift into a taciturn, looks- and phone-obsessed

3. Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 155.

thirteen-year-old. As Mary Pipher writes:

In early adolescence, studies show that girls' IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic, and 'tomboyish' personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies.⁴

Clearly, this is a tough time for girls. With the internal losses and struggles that continue as girls grow up, once they reach ages twelve and thirteen, their bodies join the fray. For most girls, this is the beginning of profound physical changes. Unfortunately, physical development severs a girl's connection as a child in the eyes of the world and marks her firmly as a woman.⁵ They quickly become objects under the predatory masculine gaze and judgmental feminine gaze.

During adolescence girls often fall into the "niceness trap." They are taught that they must be nice in order to maintain relationships.⁶ What this really means is that a girl must suppress her authentic self and voice, because it might bother someone or endanger a friendship. What this really means is that a girl is not allowed to express her true emotions, especially if her emotions are deemed "not nice," and not appropriate for a girl, such as anger, sadness, and frustration. Since girls are constantly told to be nice, not real, they never have the opportunity to learn coping strategies. Rather, they are taught to hide what they are thinking and feeling. As a result, as Pipher notes, girls stop thinking, "Who am I? What do I want?" and start thinking, "What must I do to please others?"⁷

Once a girl has been conditioned to bury her true self, she has nothing on which to base her self-confidence or self-esteem. Consequently, these too disappear. With these gone, dreams vanish as well, resulting in fewer opportunities being sought out and undertaken. Lacking dreams is perpetuated by a lack of role models and readily available examples of women who are thriving in leadership, science, math, and technology. Indeed, it is well noted that a girl cannot be what she cannot see. Another problem is that even when girls are shown images of successful women, the images maintain society's view of femininity as essential to their success, meaning that they must be thin, nice, and sexy.⁸ Consequently, a girl's dreams become as small and false as a model's retouched waist.

Lacking solid and relentless positive images of women, girls turn instead to their peers and the media for their knowledge, approval, and support. In schools, cliques set the standards for behavior and

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appearance. As Rosalind Wiseman points out: "On a daily basis, [an adolescent girl] learns what kind of girl she is 'required' to be in order to be accepted by a group or the consequences of standing her ground."⁹ This is especially true in relation to boys, who gain unprecedented power over girls' actions, hearts, and minds during adolescence. A girl will do anything, degrade herself and let go of formerly firmly held beliefs in order to capture the attention of and to please a boy.

Boys also gain physical power over girls. Violence against women and girls is perpetuated by socializing boys to see girls as objects and also by the normalization of pornography. It is easier to commit violence against objectified people, which is how boys are conditioned to see women. The statistics of violence against girls and women are alarming. For example, in the U.S. one out of every four women have experienced domestic violence, and one out of six has experienced attempted or completed rape.¹⁰ These and other similar statistics mean that you know a girl or woman, probably multiple ones, who is a survivor of violence, assault, or rape by a boy or a man. Yet, our society still views violence against girls and women as a private problem—something to be dealt with in the home or, preferably, not dealt with at all. As a result, girls live in fear. Here are three themes girls notice in relation to violence:

- (1) They believe that the world is getting more violent, and that they are in more danger each year;
- (2) they live in constant awareness of the violence around them, and the effects of violence on their own and others' lives; and
- (3) they believe victimization is a normal part of life, and expect to experience abuse or violence themselves.¹¹

Girls are constantly shown that they are worthless, that any trust they place in others is misguided, and that they must change how they live to accommodate violence. This includes violence against self. Indeed, the sexualization and objectification of girls causes "low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, eating disorders,

4. Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), 19.

5. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girl's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 164.

6. Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), x.

7. Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 22.

8. Peggy Orenstein, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 7–8.

9. Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), 79.

10. Elizabeth Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), 13.

11. Davis, *Beyond Nice*, 100.

cutting, even cognitive dysfunction.”¹² Violence against self can be an effort to try and regain control over their bodies and their lives. The violence can take the form of an eating disorder, cutting, burning, or use of drugs or alcohol. Girls no longer believe in their own innate value.

One of the main issues in the lives of adolescent girls is the ever-present hold of social media in their everyday lives. Indeed, “[f]or most American girls, social media is where they live.”¹³ A major problem, among others, with social media is its content. Most platforms are replete with images of nearly naked girls and women. Comments are uncensored, demeaning, and shame-based, pushing to the edge of pornography. Since such language and images are so widespread, they are considered normal and permissible. Further, due to the nature of our American culture, girls are stuck. They are expected to post provocative selfies and be flattered by crude comments. Social media is an insidious obsession, one they are helpless to escape.

Theology of the cross

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”¹⁴ How many adolescent girls have shouted, wept, or whispered some form of these words into the darkness of the night? Girls live in suffering, doubt, and fear. They lose themselves in the power of the other, perhaps never to find out who they truly are. These realities are why a theology of the cross should be the foundation of the church's response to the crisis facing adolescent girls. As church, we have the privilege of listening to girls' stories, taking them seriously. Moreover, we can proclaim the good news of the crucified and risen Christ within their brokenness, fear, and loss. This is at the heart of a theology of the cross, calling the thing what it actually is.¹⁵ Thus we are not to belittle the suffering of girls, but rather to listen to them and be with them in their pain and confusion. It is in the very midst of this suffering that Christ offers a profound message of hope. In Jesus Christ crucified and risen, God has freed us from the powers of sin, death, and the devil. God does not promise happiness all the days of our lives, but something so much more real. God promises to be with us amid our pain and suffering.

This is indeed good news for adolescent girls. Christ is a co-sufferer. Indeed, there is no place they can go, no chasm so deep, no pain so acute that Christ has not already been there. He has experienced and thereby understands the suffering of their lives. Christ knows what it is to be tempted, to weep at the death of a friend, and devastatingly to be talked about behind his back and betrayed by someone he trusted. He knows what it feels like to have his identity questioned, his movement through life ridiculed, and his presence unappreciated, even rejected. For girls who are struggling to find and maintain authentic relationships, Christ's

Christ becomes a relatable God, someone to cling to and appeal to in times of trouble. As girls face violence, loss of control, and loss of self, they need to hear that nothing and no one can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

life and death are examples of “deep solidarity.”¹⁶ Christ becomes a relatable God, someone to cling to and appeal to in times of trouble. As girls face violence, loss of control, and loss of self, they need to hear that nothing and no one can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As the church we cannot skip over the trials and struggles of life, moving quickly past the Good Friday periods and into the Easter Sunday glory without those silent days of pain and confusion. On the cross, our sins and our suffering are stripped bare and exposed. We see and claim our brokenness. However, we cannot abandon people in the shadows, leaving them lifeless and without the hope of the resurrection. Indeed, in the empty tomb we recognize and rejoice that God loves us and died to save us from the powers of sin, death, and the devil. Both the suffering and the hope are essential to shine light into girls' lives.

These are our girls—our daughters, sisters, friends, and neighbors. They are in our churches and communities, not in some other place far away. These are our girls. The first step for the church in this process is to see and name the problem—that our girls are being lost, drowning in an ocean of unachievable standards of beauty, ever-present social media, looming violence, and the objectifying, sexualizing gazes of men. You see, our girls desperately need a Savior. They need someone who sees their distress, cares about them, and jumps into the swells with them. This Savior might not calm the waters. However, this Savior has been there before and promises to stay with them and take them out of the storm.

The response of the church

Rethinking and restructuring religious education for girls is no small task. However, it is a necessary one. Allowing time and space for girls to discover and claim their authentic selves, within the context of a theology of the cross and the gospel, should be the mission of religious education for adolescent girls. Indeed, the church is privileged to proclaim the Savior to them, giving them hope and

12. Sales, *American Girls*, 14.

13. *Ibid.*, 9.

14. Matthew 27:46.

15. Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:53.

16. Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

a lifeline to grasp hold of in the midst of their stormy lives.

A vital aspect of this process involves creating safe learning environments, both physically and in the type of teaching and learning being done. For example, we are challenged to move from a traditional pedagogical model toward an andragogy model, where girls can experience mutual teaching, learning, trust, and respect. Yet, safety does not mean silence on difficult topics. These mutual, trusting communities can have open and honest discussions about difficult topics, such as abuse, sex, sexuality, and self-harm. Within these safe spaces, girls find wholeness through the gospel and through community. "Girls know they are losing themselves. One girl said, 'Everything good in me died in junior high.' Wholeness is shattered by the chaos of adolescence."¹⁷ However, wholeness can be restored by cultivating healthy practices and coping strategies. It is through looking to the cross that we find wholeness. We are made whole, not perfect, in the transformation of baptism, for we remain simultaneously saint and sinner even as we walk in newness of life.

We can use the power of language and words to cultivate change within the church. First, we need to change the language we use to talk about God. Talking about God in exclusively male language is oppressive, exclusionary, and contrary to the gospel. Indeed, for a young girl, it is not a big leap to believe that "if God is male, then the male is God,"¹⁸ since this message is constantly reinforced within society and within the church. It will take creativity and perseverance to make these changes. We can find expansive language for God in scripture as well as in new liturgies and hymns that speak of God expansively. Second, the church can help girls cultivate the practice of journaling. A journal can be a safe place for girls to be open and honest, to explore their own thoughts and feelings about their lives, communities, and the world around them. By journaling, girls can once again begin to discover and cultivate their voice, which is crucial for reclaiming their authentic selves.

Complementary to journaling are practices of embodied theology and spirituality. As girls' bodies change and they experience the objectification of their bodies, they need space to celebrate their unique beauty. Indeed, God loves and honors bodies, calling them temples of the Holy Spirit and charging us to glorify God with our bodies.¹⁹ Bodies also can be a strong point of connection with Jesus for adolescent girls. For example, in talking about her struggles with anorexia, a girl said: "Maybe, like me, parts of [Jesus] were starving inside, and he knew what it felt like to have no control over your life except what you do with or to your body."²⁰ Jesus is like them, and Jesus rose again, even after great suffering and death. This is a hopeful message for girls who feel out of control.

We also need to empower our girls. The heart of empowerment is the cross. It is within suffering and death that Christ saves

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and justifies, not in a glorious battle. In the same way, girls can be empowered in their suffering towards action, even as life is overwhelming. Girls need to hear the promise that within their baptismal identities they are set free from bondage to physical appearance or attractiveness to men. Language of success and failure does not apply to them, for they are not justified or saved by their achievements. God's freely given grace has already justified and saved them, and they can do nothing to earn or lose this promise. They will learn that they can be "agents of their own social change," without men and without the trappings of designer clothing and perfect makeup.²¹ Instead, the garb entrusted to them is Christ, the gospel, and their faith granted by the Holy Spirit. Clothed in this new attire, and within their baptismal vocations, girls encounter real empowerment to enact personal and social change.

When girls are empowered, they can begin to explore healthy risk-taking. It is the unknown, the uncertainty of success, and the unanswered questions that are important for girls to experience in healthy, safe ways. With risk-taking, a girl will learn to trust herself, which will not only help her confidence in the short term, but also create resiliency and self-confidence to deal with difficulties as an adult. Risk-taking can also help build community. Girls who are empowered can find a common passion and set goals to create change within their community. Within empowerment and risk-taking, adolescent girls need strong adult female mentorship. Girls need female mentors who care about their authentic selves, model healthy behavior, and provide varied examples of strength and femininity. They need voices beyond their peers and the media to help shape them and listen to them.

Sharing stories from the Bible is another essential aspect of religious education for empowering adolescent girls. Many Bible stories, in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, depict brave, faithful women, whom we are privileged to lift up in Bible studies and sermons. For example, women such as Deborah, Martha, Elizabeth, and Hannah lived their faith, loved their God, and served their neighbor. Additionally, when no women are present in a story, we can ask where they might be and what they might be doing. The church can help girls imagine these women, encouraging them to research to discover what their lives were like and how they moved through the world.

Further, Jesus' treatment of women is a vital theme to explore with girls. He treats all women with love and respect. "In Jesus' society, women were 'the oppressed of the oppressed,' carrying the

17. Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 20.

18. Guðmundsdóttir, *Meeting God on the Cross*, 19.

19. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.

20. Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-talk with Young Women* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 104.

21. Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, 13.

'double burden of low class and low gender status.'²² However, Jesus did not look down upon them or shun them, but rather ate and drank with them and appreciated them for their unique femininity. Jesus' treatment is more than kindness and setting a good example. His treatment of "the oppressed of the oppressed" offers a glimpse into the Reign of God, both here and now and yet to come. Indeed, "[b]y identifying with the Samaritan woman, the widow, the woman with the flow of blood, and the prostitute, Jesus revealed the true nature of the Reign of God, in which the last will be first and finally all injustice and suffering will be overcome."²³ The lives of girls are not lived in hopeless slumber, waiting for a prince, but rather in hopeful activity, empowered by the grace of God working in and through their lives, rejoicing in their divine Mother.

Conclusion

"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."²⁴ These are words that adolescent girls need to hear from the Savior. Girls are bleeding, hemorrhaging their self-worth and status as daughters of the Lord. They are stricken with the diseases: the loss of self, authenticity, voice, and dignity; toxic social media and derogatory stereotypes perpetuated by the media at large; the objectifying gazes of men and boys; and unattainable standards of beauty, directly linked to notions of success.

However, all hope is not lost for adolescent girls and their futures. They are not alone and not abandoned by the God who created them and crafted them in God's own image. Sojourner Truth testified that "together women ought to be able to turn [the world] rightside up again." This is a beautiful thought, but it is not complete. Within this togetherness must be God, for without God the world certainly cannot be righted. It is in the crucified and risen Christ that girls find the Savior they so desperately need and who can right the world again.

Jesus' treatment of women is a vital theme to explore with girls. He treats all women with love and respect.

22. Guðmundsdóttir, *Meeting God on the Cross*, 135.

23. Ibid.

24. Mark 5:34.



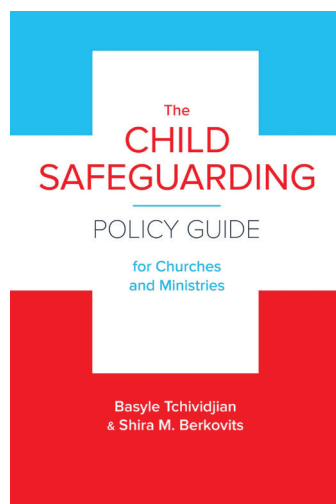
Book Reviews

July 2018

Section Editors: Craig Nessian, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

Currents in Theology and Mission is seeking to expand its number of regular book reviewers. If you have interest, please send name, contact information, and areas of primary interest to currents@lstc.edu.



The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries. By Basyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits. Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-9452-7005-5. 310 pages. Paper. \$29.99.

This book serves as the state of the art comprehensive guide for congregations in designing and implementing effective child protection policies. The authors bring impeccable credentials to this project. Tchividjian is a former child-abuse prosecutor who currently teaches Child Abuse and the Law among other courses at Liberty University School of Law, while Berkovits is founder and CEO of Sacred Spaces, a cross-denominational initiative to create systemic solutions to abuse in communal institutions. Together they have crafted a book that articulates both the reasons why such policies are imperative and specific directions for congregations to develop and enforce policies that are proven in protecting children from victimization.

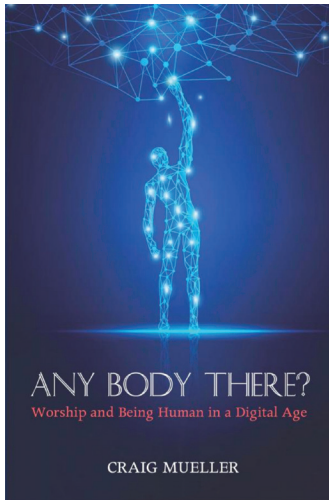
The authors define abuse in the first chapter to include: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and spiritual abuse. Regarding sexual abuse, they delineate both contact behavior and non-contact behavior. They offer the following staggering statistics: 1) “Sixty-seven percent of all sexual abuse reported to law enforcement in the United States each year is perpetrated against children.” 2) “However, the ACE [Adverse Childhood Experiences] study estimated that approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of eighteen” (12). The reality of child spiritual abuse is often overlooked, which “under the guise of religion” involves harassment or humiliation and possibly results in psychological trauma or spiritual injuries” (16).

The chapters of the book provide both rationale for and practical guidance on the following topics: indicators of abuse, impact of abuse, people who sexually abuse children, screening, safe behaviors, routine protective measures, policy violations, limited access agreements, reporting, independent reviews, abuse disclosures, ongoing survivor support, training/dissemination, and evaluating/updating the policy. The authors insist on policies that are thoroughgoing and enforceable, in contrast to many existing policies that may be on the books but are not followed consequentially. Not only does the book instruct on best protective practices but on how to respond to policy violations and support survivors.

Most important is not just “having” but actually “living” the policy. For this reason, each chapter includes a “Policy Worksheet” to guide and direct congregational leaders step by step in designing a comprehensive policy that addresses its own circumstances. The book concludes with three appendices, also for practical use: 1) Forming a Committee, 2) Sample Forms (Teen Application for a Staff or Volunteer Position, Sample Adult Application, Policy Exception Request Form, Notification Form: Necessary Deviation from Policy, Sample Child Safety Incident Report, Sample Summary of Incident Reports, Sample Parent Evaluation of Child Safety in the Church, Sample Cover Letter for Child’s Safety Evaluation Form, Sample Child’s Evaluation of Child Safety in the Church, Sample Youth Leader Evaluation Form, Quarterly Review: Limited Access Agreements, Sample Committee’s Evaluation of Child Safety in the Church) and 3) Empowering Children. By listing these topics, one can see how vital it is to implement policies that are specific regarding the issues that congregations need to consider to be effective.

The consequences for individuals violated through abuse as children last a lifetime. These include physical, emotional, psychological, communal, and spiritual effects. Congregations have for too long been vulnerable by providing ready access to people who sexually abuse children. Congregational leaders need to take seriously the instruction provided by this book to safeguard each child of God from abuse.

Craig L. Nessian
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Any Body There? Worship and Being Human in a Digital Age. By Craig Mueller. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-5326-1916-8. vii & 136 pages. Paper. \$19.98.

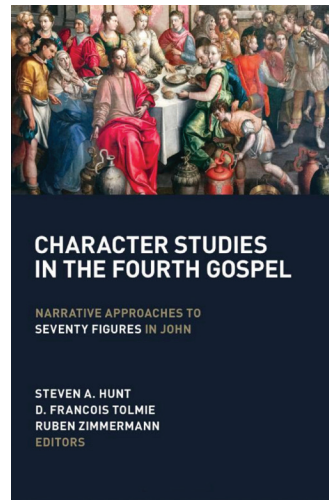
Is anybody there? Is any *body* there? The first question points to the contemporary landscape of organized reli-

gious practice, the second to a pernicious aspect of digital culture. Pastor Mueller notes two societal trends: a steady decline in church participation, and a simultaneous increase in the use of digital technologies that promote disembodiment and individualism. He proposes that participation in an incarnational, sacramental spirituality grounded in corporate worship enhances our being in the present moment, reconnects us with our bodies and the earth, and gives us a clear sense of mission in our everyday lives.

Mueller organizes each of the ten chapters around a theme from technology that defines our lives. By interweaving biblical and theological insights with personal stories and examples of technology's impact on daily life, he helpfully clarifies what is at stake when God's people gather for worship; the way we worship fundamentally frames our experience of ourselves, other people, and the earth. Readers should note that Mueller is not prescribing a *style* of worship (in the sense of the tired "traditional/contemporary" dichotomy); rather, he is advocating that Christian faith is experienced most fully through worship that emphasizes the theological significance of the body (both individual and corporate) by intentionally engaging all five senses. When the gospel of Christ's crucified and resurrected body is proclaimed and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist are celebrated in all their bodily dimensions, we are *there*, and even more significantly, *God* is there. We are present to the God who is in, with, and under the joys and sorrows of our own bodies, and we are sent by God to tend to the physical and spiritual needs of our neighbors through our vocations.

I am grateful for Mueller's wisdom on the inextricable link between worship and mission, and I suspect that many pastors and lay people will feel the same. At a time when many congregations are wondering what their mission should be, Mueller reminds us that we can answer this question only by returning to the source of our faith: an embodied encounter with the living God, who took on human form and gave his body for ours.

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Redeemer Lutheran Church
Chicago, Ill.*



Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John. Edited by Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7392-7. xxii & 724 pages. Paper. \$60.00.

With the help of an international team of over forty contributors, Hunt, Tolmie, and Zimmermann have done an exceptional job of fulfilling the stated purpose of this volume—namely, “to offer a comprehensive narrative-critical study of nearly every character Jesus (or, in some cases, only the reader) encounters in the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel [emphasizing] a literary approach to the matter, in particular from the viewpoint of characterization as it is generally understood” (xi). Addressing approximately seventy characters and character groups from a range of methodological perspectives, the contributors have produced a book that far exceeds the sum of its parts. Moreover, in addition to the essays themselves, readers will find an immensely helpful Table of Characters that extends for twelve pages, and three indices covering references, modern authors, and subjects. There is no way to do justice to the sixty-two chapters that make up the volume in the space allotted to this review, so I will limit my remarks to two editorial decisions that pertain to the book's framing and content.

The extensive review of the literature on characterization that functions as the book's Introduction offers a treasure trove of material for contextualizing the essays that follow. Nevertheless, at points it feels somewhat arbitrary. It is not always clear why a particular study warrants inclusion. Some reflect substantive shifts in perspective, while others are little more than a rehashing of longstanding ideas and approaches. Furthermore, studies are only briefly summarized rather than critiqued or assessed. Moreover, they are categorized generally by topic and then treated chronologically. This is helpful as far as it goes, but I think readers would have benefited from some identification and analysis of key trends in the scholarship. For example, among the studies that the editors chose to survey, there seems to be a tendency toward increasingly emphasizing minor characters, a heightened awareness of ambiguity and complexity, and recurring questions concerning the relationship both of narrative to history and of characters to persons.

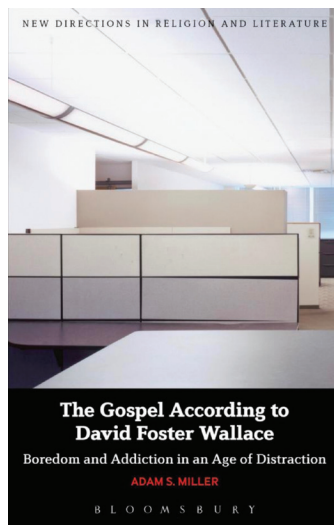
The editors' rationale for methodological variety in relation to the characteristic “openness” of John's gospel, coupled with



their rationale for excluding the figure of Jesus (along with “God/Father,” “the Holy Spirit/Paraclete,” non-human “characters,” “Scripture,” and some others), is intriguing. Although convincing, I would have been very interested, nonetheless, to read a concluding essay written precisely from the standpoint that the character of John’s Jesus, like the Fourth Gospel itself, resists efforts to circumscribe and name precisely. Such an essay may have incorporated one or more of the theoretical perspectives that are not well represented in the volume (e.g., poststructuralism). Despite the plethora of descriptors attached to him, there is a fundamental elusiveness to the character of Jesus in John. The play of denotations and connotations throughout the gospel, and the manner in which the characterization of Jesus takes shape in and through the intersections of other characters in the story, seem to create a sort of absented character that exists in a negative space. A chapter attempting to decipher precisely what *kind* of character John’s Jesus is, especially in relation to the characterological analyses of the other essays, might have illustrated some of the potential this volume as a whole has to advance New Testament narrative criticism beyond where it is presently.

Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel is unlike any other resource presently available to those interested in narrative analysis of characters and characterization. Given its breadth, the accessibility of the individual essays, and the wealth of footnotes, it will prove equally valuable to scholars, students, and serious readers alike.

Scott S. Elliott
Adrian College, Michigan



The Gospel According to David Foster Wallace: Boredom and Addiction in an Age of Distraction. By Adam S. Miller. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4742-3697-3. xiv & 119 pages. Paper. \$29.95.

This is a smart book about the theological implications of a brilliant literary figure,

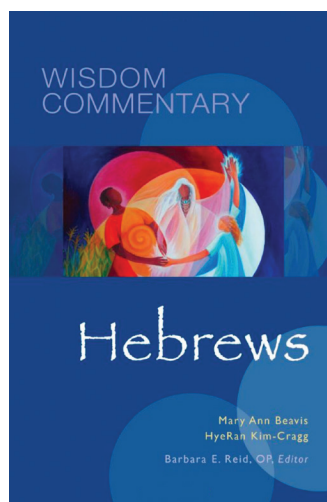
David Foster Wallace. Organized into thirty concise chapters with an Afterword, this treatment could serve either as an introduction to the fiction and essays of Foster Wallace or, for those already initiated, an incisive analysis of his central themes freighted with theological import. Each chapter dissects a slice of Foster Wallace’s output: Books, Heads, Maps, Addiction, Desire, Watching, Masks, Boredom, Bodies, Prayer, Clichés, Epiphany, etc. For those desiring an exposure to the person whose thought

is here mined, I suggest viewing the YouTube of his Kenyon College commencement address, “This is Water”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CrOL-ydFMI>. A better analysis of the human condition in contemporary parlance would be hard to find.

The fundamental human problem is the kind of mind that belongs to us and the alienation of this mind from the human body grounded in this physical, material world. In this regard Foster Wallace hearkens back to the novels and essays of Walker Percy, who is his forebear in analyzing what is amiss in the contemporary world. Miller comments: “Even if you disavow religion . . . altogether, you can’t avoid worship. The impulse to worship is a human problem, not a religious problem” (xi). Especially in his masterwork, *Infinite Jest*, and the novel unfinished at his suicide, *The Pale King*, Foster Wallace portrays the estrangement of human beings from embodied creatureliness through archetypal characters who each portray the struggle to be, or not to be, with their heads embattled by addiction, ambition, distraction, tedium, and, especially in our era, irony.

Taking umbrage with interpretations of Foster Wallace that disparage his work as nihilistic (Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*), Miller contends that the central insight is that of surrender—surrender that involves a “saturating intuition” and leads to the gift of “paying attention” to the world other-wise. “This moment when it looks like your worship has failed is the religious moment. This is the revelation. This moment allows the aiming itself to appear. And it is in the aiming *itself*, not in the object aimed at, that God is most clearly manifest. This is the epiphany” (xii–xiii). Not a book for the faint of heart but for those who choose to enter into the contemporary abyss in the hope of enlightenment.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Hebrews. By Mary Ann Beavis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg. Wisdom Commentary Series 54. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8146-8204-3. xciii & 238 pages. Paper. \$39.95.

The Wisdom commentary series is like no other. Seeking to provide the first full-scale feminist commentary on every book of the Bible, it unites diverse voices to elucidate the history of the text and its impact through the lens of Wisdom, which aims at “justice and well-being for everyone and everything” (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Forward,” xiii)—or,



in other words, “a deepening of faith, with the Bible serving as an aid to bring the flourishing of life” (Barbara E. Reid, O.P., “Editor’s Introduction,” xxxii). The Hebrews volume is the first New Testament book to appear in the series. Co-authored by a Canadian New Testament professor (Beavis) and a Korean-Canadian Pastoral Studies professor (Kim-Cragg), it notices the connections between Hebrews and Jewish wisdom literature in order to “excavate the sophialogy of Hebrews” (xxxix). Two Filipina scholars (Ibita), a Jewish rabbi (Lewis), a Presbyterian New Testament scholar (Calvert-Koyzis), and a First Nations poet (Annharte) also join in to comment on the text itself or the topics it raises.

After an extensive introduction of the contributors and their methodologies, Calvert-Koyzis traces the typical background questions and possible answers for the anonymous “Epistle to the Hebrews.” It provides an adequate introduction to the various options even as it occasionally offers unique suggestions, such as a preference for a “collective authorship” based on the practice of multiple writers that contributed to ancient writings. The introduction also briefly introduces the major interrelated themes of the book joined to the central theme (in their opinion) of faith. It closes with a few examples of proto-feminist readings of Hebrews in the history of interpretations. Few exist, but it is Hebrews’ quality as a marginalized text that makes it an ideal candidate for consideration by feminist and post-colonial interpreters.

Expositions of several particular texts provide a window into the nature of this unique commentary. Concerning the prologue of Heb 1:1–4, the authors focus upon the homiletical nature and possible impact of these poetic words, a fresh approach often ignored or marginalized in a textually focused discipline. Readers should be aware, however, that the authors are willing to be critical about the text. For example, they see Hebrews’ statement of Christ’s comprehensive inheritance as problematic and colonial which “justifies the imposition of a single perspective on other nations and other religions” (4).

In the treatment of chapters 8–10, an essay on blood, sacrifice, atonement, and ritual, Kim-Cragg draws out implications for these central themes for ecology and women, focusing upon the work of theologians and a German-Indian poet. Finally, the diversity of voices, even their disagreement, is on display in the analysis of *paideia*—education. Beavis highlights the place of women in the field of education, even if it was dominated by men, whereas Kim-Cragg, following the teaching of Jesus who “would teach us to transgress unjust legal systems,” urges interpreters to use the hermeneutic of suspicion to challenge Hebrews’ calls to submit to God’s fatherly discipline.

Students of Hebrews would do well to have this book on their shelves. It listens to the sermon in diverse and fresh ways. Its breadth leaves the reader longing for more depth in many places, but a groundbreaking text like this perhaps serves only as an invitation to the dialogue. Readers are called to the interpretive circle to build upon and even disagree with these interpretations in a common effort to gain Wisdom—defined by these volumes

as practical insight and relationship with the divine—from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Amy L. Peeler
Wheaton College



Kierkegaard: A Single Life. By Stephen Backhouse. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-3105-2088-7. 310 pages. Cloth. \$24.99.

Kierkegaard (SK) haunts contemporary theology. “Kierkegaard is hardly a household name, yet his fingerprints are everywhere” (206). Even as SK intensified

the turn to existentialist reflection beginning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries among authors including Ibsen, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Kafka, and Arendt, so also he transformed the nature of theological discourse among Christian writers such as Barth, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, and Merton. Martin Luther King Jr. reflected the influence of SK’s concern in his Nobel lecture when he said: “Our problem today is that we have allowed the internal to become lost in the external. We have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live” (202). Chapter 10, “A Life Continued,” sketches the reach and influence of SK’s thought from the time of his own life (1813–1855) to the present.

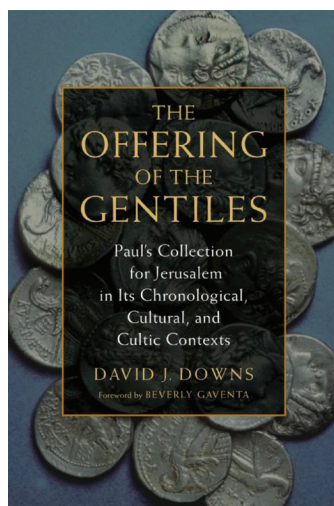
This book is a concise, reliable, and thoughtful introduction to the milieu of things SK. The narrative of this biography weaves together his complex, lifelong commitment to the beloved woman, Regine, whom out of devotion and respect he chose not to marry; the looming influence of his father and disjointed relationships with family and friends; his writings, which include many pseudonymous works, with insights into his authorial strategies; and his prophetic critique of the institutional church in Denmark toward the end of his life, the so-called “Attack on Christendom.” Although an impossible task, Backhouse devotes more than fifty pages to concise summaries of all SK’s books. This is a particular gift to those either new to his corpus or overwhelmed with the bulk of his works, in order to discover entry points for reading SK’s own writings.

Scholars of SK in the U.S., like Walter Lowrie, David Swenson, and Edna and Howard Hong, have contributed to the knowledge, translation, and collection of the SK literary legacy that has made a comprehensive collection of his works available to grateful English readers. At the heart of SK’s concern is that each of us stands in the presence of the living God and each one



is called to attend to the voice of the living Jesus Christ. Where the church has obscured the existential urgency of heeding the ultimate in deference to penultimate matters, SK raises an alarm. “Kierkegaard’s thoughts need to be encountered, one by one, person by person, or they are not encountered at all. His insistence on authentic existence is simply stated.... As long as people continue to live and move and have their being in habitual ideas of their own creation, Kierkegaard will continue to upbuild and provoke wherever he is encountered by the Single One” (207). SK remains a seminal figure now for our time.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts. By David J. Downs. Foreword by Beverly Roberts Gaventa. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7313-2. xviii & 204 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

While for years at a time the collection Paul took among his Gentile congregations for the Jewish-Christian mother church in Jerusalem has sat barely simmering on the back-burner of Pauline theological stoves, every so often a scholar turns up the heat and discovers new and unexpected insights. David Downs' 2007 Princeton dissertation, originally printed in 2008 and republished in 2016, does just that. Provocative, well-researched, and clearly written, the book argues that the collection was much more than a practical aside. Rather, it was an important theological statement in and of itself, a perspective that could be very helpful in parish settings today.

Downs moves away from two long-term explanations of the collection. First, he argues that the fund mentioned in Galatians 2:10 is different from and earlier than the collection known from 1-2 Corinthians and Romans. Part of Downs' reasoning is that he does not identify the later collection as based on the kind of obligation found in Galatians 2:10, and Paul's concern that the collection might be rejected (Rom 15:31) makes no sense if, in fact, the collection was the result of an agreement between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders. Second, he denies that the collection is properly viewed as the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem.

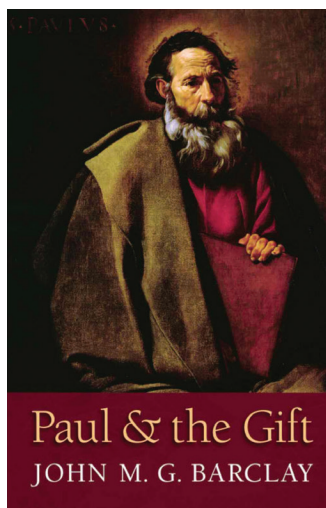
In developing his positions Downs adds many ingredients to the recipe needed to comprehend the collection. One addi-

tion is a chapter that relates the collection to research done on Graeco-Roman associations and Jewish synagogues. A second ingredient Downs adds to the Pauline pot is a chapter that views the collection as a cultic act of worship within which material relief was given.

There are four points where, I think, the seasoning in Downs' recipe could be more precise. First, by failing to look at the understanding of reciprocity within the context of the fictive family of the Pauline churches, Downs understands obligation as more of an external "must" than an internal attitude of giving that does not keep score. Second, he could well investigate how the cultic framework he suggests might fit with the eschatological pilgrimage interpretation, which he rejects. Third, to make his point that Paul was involved in two collections Downs ironically, given his dismissal of Acts as a source for Paul, relies on Acts 11:27-30 for evidence of the first collection. It is not possible to keep salt out of the recipe and put it in at the same time! Fourth, he argues that Paul's anxiety about how the Jerusalem leaders would accept the offering makes no sense if they had asked for it. Response: the Jerusalem leaders had, in fact, not lived up to the agreement outlined in Galatians 2:1-10 (see Galatians 2:11-14 and the Judaizers in Galatia). The collection was a challenge to them to live according to the agreement, a challenge they may not have welcomed.

I learned from Downs many new ways to flavor my understanding of Paul's collection/s. The work merits a revised edition that would dialogue with his reviewers and deepen his application of cultural anthropology to a topic on which his work is now the benchmark study.

Walter F. Taylor Jr.
Ernest W. and Edith S. Ogram Professor Emeritus
of New Testament Studies
Trinity Lutheran Seminary



Paul and the Gift. By John M. G. Barclay. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6889-3. xvi & 656 pages. Cloth. \$70.00.

The last two generations of scholarship in Pauline theology have demonstrated that Paul's preoccupation with divine grace was not a Christian innovation. Second Temple Judaism understood itself and Jewish election as rooted in a gracious God. Paul's Christ-centered theology thus had much more in common with ancient Jewish beliefs than the Christian church has recognized through-



out most of its history. *Paul and the Gift*, a masterful book, now sharpens our vision, providing invaluable nuance to our understanding of Paul's context and where he fit within ancient Jewish discourse about grace. John Barclay demonstrates that during Paul's era there were a variety of Jewish perspectives on grace and on whether divine benevolence toward people should be viewed as an appropriate reward or as a benefit that was "incongruous" in light of its recipients' worthlessness or sinfulness. When Barclay considers Paul's writings in light of those ancient debates, he directs readers to the apostle's distinctive ways of understanding God's incongruous grace in Christ as the impetus for newfound "obedience" among the Christian communities Paul founded. This obedience corresponds to believers' "new allegiance" (492) to God. Such obedience includes conduct that expresses new norms and thus "subverts pre-constituted systems of worth" (6).

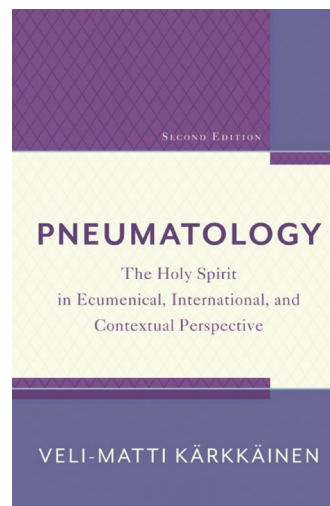
Barclay's arguments demand close attention, but his engaging prose makes that work easier. The book examines gift-giving from anthropological, theological, and historical perspectives; more than half of the pages explore how grace has been understood according to anthropological methodologies, by major Christian thinkers, and in selected Jewish writings from the Second Temple period. Once Barclay has established that Paul's teachings on grace must be evaluated in connection to ancient Jewish conversations that involved a variety of opinions, the book turns to examine the depiction of Christ as God's gracious gift in Galatians and Romans. As Barclay sees it, Paul's interest does not gravitate around a general idea of God's characteristic benevolence but around the particular event of Christ's death and resurrection. Paul describes God's grace in Christ as utterly incongruous—meaning that it operates according to a "shocking lack of match with the worth of its beneficiaries, in ethnic, cognitive, moral, or other terms" (446). But the incongruity does not mean that Paul and his letters' audiences understood the divine gift as one that lacked any expectation for recipients to provide some kind of offering in return (for the idea of an *entirely* unreciprocated "gift" was unfamiliar to Paul and his ancient contemporaries). The gift of Christ transforms reality and thus creates communities that live out, as a kind of obligatory response, their "newness of life" (Rom 6:4) as a new culture informed by new norms.

The greatest strength of *Paul and the Gift* is its survey of ancient attitudes about gifts and divine grace. The treatment of Galatians and Romans whets without fully satisfying the appetite. But that is due to the complexity of those epistles and their interpretive history. Barclay has written a book that will be prominent in conversations about Paul and his writings for generations to come. Fortunately, he promises more publications devoted to fuller discussions of these topics—additional sustenance is on its way.

Barclay's target audience is mostly scholars, but a wider audience will find his insights and erudition a welcome and rewarding gift. This book is no esoteric tour through ancient notions of gifts, divine graciousness, and reciprocity. Barclay knows well

that a sharper understanding of Pauline theology has vital implications for the gospel articulated in congregational ministry. He notes in his conclusion that in our current contexts "churches now find themselves needing to rediscover their social, political and cultural identity" (573). A deeper and nuanced appreciation of Paul's theology of grace can help with that task, for it will give churches paralyzed by their cultural trappings "resources for the dissolution of pre-formed assumptions and for the constructing of boundary-erasing communities" (573). Pauline theology is hardly done with us yet.

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Luther Seminary



Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective.

By Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8010-9946-5. viii & 199 pages. Paper. \$26.00.

As the title suggests, this book is a survey of various perspective and approaches to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and, as such, it is more descriptive rather than constructive in nature. This does not mean that the author does not offer his own views, but that, when he does, it is mostly in passing.

The first chapter gives a helpful survey of the place of the Holy Spirit in contemporary theology, which sets the stage for the remainder of the book. The second chapter explores biblical perspectives on the Holy Spirit, treating imagery connected with the Spirit in biblical literature, the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments, offering, in turn, some theological implications of the biblical data. The third chapter surveys in some detail developments regarding the Holy Spirit in the patristic era. The chapter of greatest length, the fourth, covers a vast terrain, moving from the medieval period to the modern, touching on Western and Eastern articulations of the Holy Spirit, the filioque debate, the views of John Calvin and Martin Luther, as well as the Holy Spirit in modern liberalism and Neo-Calvinism, to name a few.

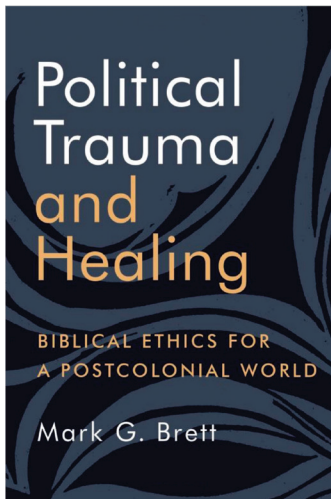
The two subsequent chapters move from historical survey to a survey of the contemporary theological landscape. The first of these gives attention to twentieth and twenty-first century engagements with pneumatology, which includes a decisive turn toward the same. The second of these is a fascinating look at approaches to the Holy Spirit from contextual (e.g., feminist,



liberation) and global perspectives (Africa, Asia). The global perspective, along with the seventh chapter of the book, which details pneumatology in other religions (this is perhaps the most unique contribution of the volume), is what sets this edition apart from the first edition. Kärkkäinen then ends his survey with an epilogue that amounts to a call to fresh engagement of the Holy Spirit.

It is without question that the author is very widely read in theological literature, which his survey so clearly demonstrates; and, with this, he has the remarkable ability to clearly summarize differing and complex periods and perspectives of study. Yet, as with any survey, there are limitations. A pastor or Christian educator should not approach this text hoping to have an in-depth understanding of the Bible's teaching on the Holy Spirit or that of the Fathers or modern theologians. Rather, even with its relative depth and complexity at points, further depth in any of the areas covered would require this book to be supplemented by others that treat the area or period under question. To conclude, this book would be most helpful for the pastor or Christian educator who needs the breadth it provides to bring balance or perspective to works of more depth in the study of pneumatology.

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Political Trauma and Healing. By Mark G. Brett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7307-1. xviii & 248 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

P*olitical Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World* is Mark Brett's masterful contribution to ways biblical scholars, activists, pastors, and others

can learn from sophisticated political theory and sound biblical scholarship, can engage contemporary political and ethical topics (immigrant rights, land ownership and heritage, indigenous rights, ecology), and can bring forth to the public square religious arguments (biblical imaginaries in the politics) and practices of restorative and redemptive justice (for instance, how Christian communities can circumvent the nation-state boundaries and the one-directional flow of wealth imposed by Western Capitalism by participating in and creating alternative models such as fair trade).

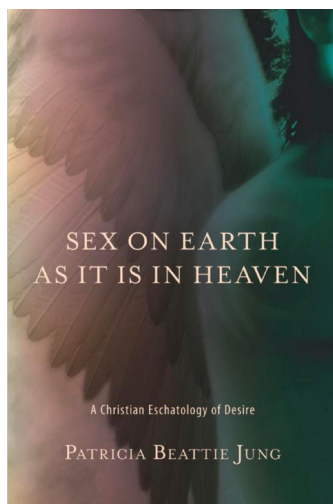
Brett's starting point is the historical entanglement of bibli-

cal doctrine (broadly understood) and colonialism, not to undo the imperialist heritage but to account for the resistant strategies that biblical theology has repeatedly posed against imperialism. Of particular interest for pastors, congregations, activists and organizers, is the book's understanding of biblical imaginaries, that is a conception of Scripture as embodied argumentation, as an ethos, a way of being that constitutes us in our subjectivity and our communal living. Ultimately, the Bible holds political meaning today in the public sphere not because of its authors' intentions or because it is divinely inspired but because its narratives have shaped our political histories and religious stories. Accordingly, the book models an approach for churches to engage with public issues.

With the overall concern of foregrounding Christian discourse in the public arena, Brett explores the legitimacy and advantages of the Christian message for contemporary public discourse—that is, the desirability of a public secular theology. The author's hermeneutical strategies are rich and varied: for instance, Joshua and its supposedly nationalistic discourse does not map onto contemporary patriotic discourse unless we take into consideration how those narratives worked as resistant accounts of the Israelite religion in the context of the Assyrian empire. This “ideological” understanding of the text, Brett sensitively adds, is one that Maoris adopted to drive out Imperial Britain. A similar approach undergirds Brett's argument about the hospitality that Christians are to show toward undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers, especially in light of a certain internationalism that, in the Hebrew Bible, stretches the boundaries of the covenantal community.

The book also offers, in its concluding chapter, an educational—although somewhat insufficient—introductory view of the contributions that biblical imaginaries could offer to reform the current capitalist system that, it bears repeating, benefits Christian communities. This is informative because it hints at how biblical normative views on the economy might correct an unchallenged capitalist economy today. It is insufficient because it remains at the abstract level without identifying (unlike the biblical books) the specific practices and institutions that keep such systems in place. Such naming, I submit, is a pressing task for communities across the globe, and Brett's book offers a magisterial starting point for those communities to elaborate a secular theology that is philosophically informed, historically faithful, and theologically inspirational.

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Sex on Earth as It Is in Heaven: A Christian Eschatology of Desire.

By Patricia Beattie Jung. New York: SUNY Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4384-6381-0. xxv & 271 pages. Paper. \$23.95.

Patricia Beattie Jung argues that there is sexual desire and bodily sexual pleasure in heaven (Part 1). Furthermore,

this gloriously transformed eschatological vision of sex in heaven should serve as a foundation for sexual ethics and sexual practices here on earth (Part 2).

Jung recognizes that while the resurrection of the whole person, consistent with our embodied existence, is an article of faith, there are differences among Christians as to how we understand the resurrected life. This includes some Christians who doubt the physical resurrection. Contemporary interpretations of Paul's reference to the "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15) of the resurrected life as lacking in physicality illustrate the problematic.

A further challenge to her proposal is Christianity's history of ambiguity about sex and pleasure in sex. The conflation of sex with lust (Augustine) has helped to make all sex suspect. Given this outlook, sex in heaven is unthinkable and has been for generations of Christian thought. Another mark against sex in heaven is the related and ongoing Roman Catholic insistence on openness to procreation in all sexual intercourse. Traditional visions of heaven do not include procreation. She admits that there has been little support in the tradition for sex in heaven.

Despite the views about the bodily nature of the resurrected life and the prospect of sex in heaven that are at odds with her convictions, Jung makes a compelling case for sexual pleasure in heaven, drawing from scripture and tradition with the help of some key contemporary interpreters. She is careful to say that this is a transformed sexual life that we cannot fully envision, but a resurrected life of sexual pleasure nonetheless.

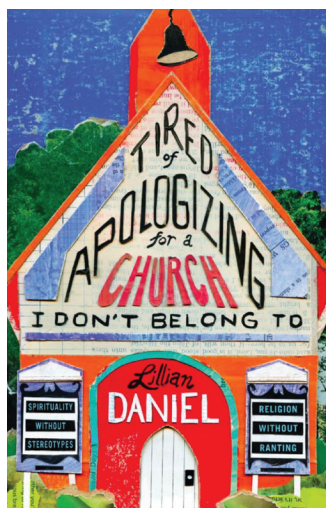
The consequence of this eschatological perspective for sexual ethics is something a bit different. Many have an impression of Christian sexual ethics that the "should-nots" are more explicit than the "shoulds." For Jung what we should be doing is the emphasis here. If heavenly sex is transformed sex that is truly love-making, sex on earth should be as well. Therefore, we have a moral obligation to nurture the sexual pleasure of love-making in all its visceral, genital reality. We need to treasure the intimacy of touch. Moreover, when sexual desire and engagement in love-making wanes, it is a problem to be dealt with and not simply accepted. However, as the final chapter makes clear, pornography is not a suitable way to nurture our sexual lives because it fosters

a desire to take pleasure rather than share pleasure and thereby reinforces a tendency to turn away from each other.

This book makes an important contribution to our thinking about sexual ethics. It is bold in its explicit affirmation of bodily existence and the real experience of sexual sharing with all its imperfections as nonetheless a sanctified reality. She gives expression not simply to a view of sexuality but grounds her perspective theologically as could only come from a person of deep faith.

James M. Childs Jr.

*Joseph A. Sittler Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics
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Tired of Apologizing for a Church I Don't Belong To.

By Lillian Daniel. New York/Nashville: FaithWords, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4555-9588-4. vii & 208 pages. Paper. \$14.99.

Lillian Daniel has passion for a faith that is deeply rooted in things that make a difference. Therefore, she is keen on taking readers to the

heart of the matter, challenging us not to get distracted by widespread stereotypes about what it means to be a Christian. While it has become commonplace to refer to many as "spiritual but not religious," Daniel pushes back with the claim that religion means community. And people in our time certainly are searching for community, exactly what Christianity has to offer. She develops an astute and extremely insightful heuristic for distinguishing among four types of "nones": 1) no way, 2) no longer, 3) never have, and 4) not yet. Church leaders would do well to heed these distinctions as we seek to develop life-giving relationships with those beyond the church community, especially by engaging those who are "not yet", who "may be curious about the church and may choose to show up" (39).

Among those things that matter to Daniel are worship and talking about the faith. She places worship at the center of the church's life and would have us offer there a substantial encounter with God and the Christian treasures. People are longing for a more rigorous faith and efforts to take them into the depths of the Christian tradition will not be wasted: "There is an alternative to make-it-up-yourself spirituality. It is called a mature faith, practiced in community over time, grounded in God, centered in worship, called to serve and free to dream" (192). The Christian journey is an adventure that we can hang onto for life. Daniel also gives much encouragement for Christians to talk about their faith. She provides much colorful description of how such con-



versations open paths for the Spirit to work.

Pastor Daniel writes: “I want to be grounded in God, centered in worship, called to serve, and free to dream. I think other people may want that, too” (180). This book can serve as a compass to help the church regain her bearings in topsy-turvy times.

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BRIEFLY NOTED

In *The Exodus from Egypt: How it Happened and Why it Matters* (HarperOne, \$27.99), Richard Elliott Friedman puts forth his own historical reconstruction of the Exodus. Scholars acknowledge that despite the widespread attestation of the Exodus in the Old Testament, evidence from Egyptian records and archaeology is non-existent, and the number of Israelites involved, 2 million, is highly unlikely. Friedman thinks that the Exodus involved only the Levites, who later joined up with Israelites who were already in the land. There was no conquest. Yahweh, the God of the Levites, was merged with El, the God of the Israelites, a merger that eventually led to Israelite monotheism. Friedman notes that the eight Egyptian names in the Bible (e.g., Moses and Aaron) are all Levites. He thinks that three of the Pentateuchal sources are also Levitical, including E, D, and P. But the evidence for E being written by a Levite is weak in my opinion, and the author of P was a priest who reduced the Levites to a lower level of the clergy. Friedman assigns very early dates to the poems in Exodus 15 and Judges 5, as in the work of Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, but many scholars now contest this dating. Friedman writes with a flair and his book is a page-turner, but his proposals will not convince many.

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Preaching Helps

Pentecost 6, July 1 — Pentecost 20, October 7

Summertime: Mark and John and Abundant Bread

This issue of “Preaching Helps” takes us from the beginning of July through the first Sunday in October. If you’ve been preaching for a few years, you probably know that this lectionary year spends five weeks on John chapter 6. That is a lot of bread! Perhaps this is why pastors take vacation in the month of August, at least in Year B! Our writers engage this chapter starting on July 29 with John’s story of Jesus feeding 5000 people with a boy’s lunch. If you’re not up for five weeks of bread, you may decide to step outside John’s gospel and engage the other appointed readings. One possibility is to dig deeply into Ephesians, the Second Reading for July 15 through August 26. Preaching a series of sermons on an epistle gives people a chance to learn about the setting for the letter, the particular concerns addressed by the writer, and live more fully within the letter rather than dipping a toe in one Sunday. You can encourage people to read the letter at home and imagine themselves as part of the church in Ephesus. The First Readings from Exodus, 1 Kings, Proverbs, and Joshua, also offer vivid images for preaching. Two important feast days honoring women also come during the summer months: Mary Magdalene on July 23 and Mary, mother of Jesus, on August 15. Neither of these dates falls on a Sunday but give yourself permission to honor these two Marys on July 22 and August 12. If you choose to stay with John 6 for five weeks, you’ll find ample help in the following pages.

We return to Mark’s gospel on September 2 and begin reading through the letter of James. The abundance of bread in John 6 is challenged by the Syrophenician woman on September 9: “Even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Will there be any bread for her and her daughter from the baskets left over in John 6? September is marked by the anticipation of a new school year and people returning to worship after summer travels. There may also be a sense of wistfulness as vacation days have passed too quickly and a grown-up child leaves home for college for the first time. Even if our lives are no longer marked by the academic calendar, something in our cells remembers end-of-summer as a time when something new is about to happen.

We welcome several new writers for this summer issue of “Preaching Helps.” Though some are new to *Currents*, these writers often appear in other publications. They span the United States from California and Washington to New

Jersey. **Patrick Cabello Hansel** has served for thirty-three years in multicultural communities in the Bronx, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis. With his wife, Luisa, he pastors San Pablo/St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. Together they began the Semilla Center for Healing and the Arts. Patrick is a poet and fiction writer. His book of poems *The Devouring Land* will be published by Main Street Rag Publishing in early 2019. **Mary Halvorson** and her husband, Dan Garness, are co-pastors of Grace University Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, a church surrounded by the University of Minnesota and the University of Minnesota Hospital. This is Mary’s twenty-fifth year as pastor of Grace. When she is not wrestling with sermons, she delights in her two granddaughters, reading, running, and collecting stories and ideas. **Kari Lipke and Joanne Engquist** serve as pastors in downtown Seattle among the people gathered as Gethsemane Lutheran Church and The Garden. In their sacred, ordinary life together—in marriage and in ministry—they seek to be encouragers of life, in love and service toward God and all the world of God’s loving. **Joseph Schattauer Pailé** is the pastor of Advent Lutheran Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey. He is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and St. Olaf College. You can find his writing in *The Cresset*, *Perspectives*, and the “Reinterpreting Mission” edition of *Currents*. **John Rollefson** is a familiar friend in these pages. An ELCA pastor, he has served urban and campus ministries in San Francisco, Milwaukee, Ann Arbor, and Los Angeles, plus interims in Solvang and London. John’s book *Postils for Preaching: Commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C* is now available, along with Years A and B. (Editor’s note: these three books are wonderful resources for preachers.) John and his wife, Ruth, live in San Luis Obispo, California, where they are members of Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church. **Bradley Schmelting** serves as senior pastor at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minnesota. A graduate of Ohio University and Trinity Lutheran Seminary, he did doctoral work at Emory University in ritual studies and pastoral care. He has served congregations in Columbus, Ohio and Atlanta, Georgia, and now lives in the Twin Cities with his husband, Darin, learning to love winter and trusting the promise of spring.

Hopefully God will surprise the people and the preacher even though we’re still in “Ordinary Time” for several more weeks. Perhaps it will be like the surprise of hearing an Advent text from Isaiah in September: “For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.” (First Reading for September 9) Perhaps you’ll splash the congregation with water on the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost!

Barbara K. Lundblad
Editor, “Preaching Helps”

July 1, 2018

Pentecost 6/Lectioary 13

Lamentations 3:22–33

Psalm 30

2 Corinthians 8:7–15

Mark 5:21–43

Engaging the Texts

Today's gospel reading comes from the section of Mark that focuses on Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing mission in and around Galilee. Immediately prior to this Sunday's stories we hear of Jesus healing the Gerasene demoniac, then stilling a storm that was about to swamp the boat in which he and his disciples were traveling.

One can read these stories together with today's stories of healing the hemorrhaging woman and raising Jairus' daughter as demonstrating the breadth of Jesus' healing power: curing a profound mental illness; interceding in natural disaster; curing a devastating physical ailment; and raising a dead child to life.

Today we might refer to these situations as traumatic occurrences in the lives of those who suffered and witnessed them. Traumas are overwhelming experiences that happen outside of one's ability to control them, and that threaten life, bodily integrity, or sanity. Trauma has the power to mire us in the muck of the past—stealing our sense of having a future and enveloping us in clouds of fear.

When he heals, Jesus does more than cure illness. Notably, Jesus lifts people out of their burdened pasts and restores to them the possibility of a future. For the hemorrhaging woman, twelve years of pain and ineffective but costly medical interventions have left her destitute and exhausted. Then in an instant, when she touches Jesus' clothing, she feels in her very body that a change for the good has taken place. Still, even though she received what she thought she came for, Jesus isn't content that she remain anonymous to him. He calls her out, not to chastise, but in order to hear her story, to validate her healing, and to name her "daughter." Jesus wants her to know that she did not steal something he wasn't willing to give; she needs to know that he sees her with the same love that burns in Jairus as he pleads for the life of his daughter. The woman needs not only the physical healing that she was able to gain through her own courageous reach, but also the restoration of her dignity, of her place in the family of humanity—a beloved, blessed daughter. That's how her future is most fully opened to her.

Meanwhile, the future for Jairus' daughter had closed entirely. When a child dies, often it is not only an ending of their future, but the future of a family and sometimes even

a larger community. Raising a child back to life is a vivid example of restoring the future because there is so much time to gain, and so many years of possibility that open up. All of this begins with an invitation to get up and an offer of something to eat—her new life nourished and nurtured by the family around her.

Pastoral Reflections

While today's reading from Lamentations confidently extols the faithfulness of God, the psalmist puts on our lips words of praise for God who "turns wailing into dancing" (or, still more vividly, changes "lament into whirling dance," as Eugene Peterson renders Psalm 30:11a in *The Message*). Yet how many more people in our neighborhoods and congregations have not witnessed the unceasing love of God? How many long to *experience* the transformation of mourning to joy? How many wait quietly for God's salvation in a world rife with injustice, in a society that doles out far worse than insults (Lam 3:30) to those judged to be unworthy because their/our bodies or desires, their/our politics or practices do not conform? Who in our communities has anguished twelve long years—hemorrhaging either literally or metaphorically? As we reflect on today's stories of restoration, may we remember not only those healed but others in the crowd who also follow along and reach out in faith, but have not yet been made whole.

Perhaps it is valuable also to ask ourselves what it was about Jesus that inspired trust from the suffering people who sought his help. How might their life experiences have shaped the ways in which they sought healing? Are those differences notable still today? Do our communities nurture a sense that some bodies "deserve" healing more than others? Are there some people whom we accuse of "stealing healing" today? According to today's stories, what might Jesus have to say about that?

Another approach asks us to consider ourselves as the body of Christ in the world today. We might notice who is being cut off now, and how we might work toward restoring to life and community those who are cut off. Maybe we think of ourselves as family to the one invited to get up (be raised to new life): is there an image for us as ones urged to nourish those whose lives are made new? Perhaps we will think differently about that task by considering the work of Louis Cozolino, a psychologist at Pepperdine, who challenges the "survival of the fittest" mentality when it comes to humans today, positing instead the survival of the *nurtured*. Those who are nurtured best survive best (see *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*).

Kari Lipke and Joanne Engquist

July 8, 2018

Pentecost 7/Lectioary 14

Ezekiel 2:1–5

Psalm 123

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

Mark 6:1–13

Engaging the Texts

Throughout today's readings runs a thread concerning both the authority and limitations of those commissioned as witnesses. When Ezekiel is sent to "a rebellious house," the first thing God makes clear comes in how Ezekiel is addressed ("Mortal"), grounding the prophet's call in finitude, in limitation. Paul testifies to another's ecstatic experience "caught up in the third heaven," but for his part only *boasts* of his own weakness. Rejected by neighbors in Nazareth and doing almost no deeds of power in his hometown, Jesus' next move is to send out disciples *with* authority over unclean spirits but *without* nearly anything else for their journey.

Today's passage from Paul's letter to the unruly, contentious church at Corinth runs the risk of being quickly dismissed because of the descriptions of ecstasies from Paul's acquaintances who claim intense spiritual experiences (and thereby look down on those who have not been similarly set apart in the community). Easily enough hearers' responses swing between dismissive eye rolls and full-scale envy. Yet Paul boasts not in the extraordinary, but in that which is everyday, the completely commonplace: weakness. Vulnerability, Paul argues, is vital to the strength of those who serve Christ. Making personal his longing to be relieved of some "thorn in the flesh," Paul explains his sense of how it is that this "thorn" actually keeps him humble (or, at least as humble as Paul ever is!). A key word in the Greek is *uperairōmai* which implies arrogance by way of raising up oneself over another. Tied to the letter's larger message of reconciliation (not least between Paul and the Corinthians he loves, but more centrally between God and the creation God loves), it is essential that Paul's autobiographical notes routinely draw from this perspective of Paul's dependence on God's grace in all things. By extension, all who serve Christ are called to cherish vulnerability, remembering ourselves to be like earthen vessels which hold the extraordinary power of God (2 Cor 4:7).

The text in Mark similarly presses an examination of sufficiency, inviting renewed reflection on what extends and expands power and authority. The community that one expects to cherish Jesus is the one in which his deeds of power are limited. Does that experience inform Jesus' approach, which sends the disciples out in pairs but without the usual "baggage" of all that one might consider necessary and basic

(bread and bag and money in the belts!)? One might wonder also at the "normalizing" of situations in which one is not well received. Whether that is Jesus' hometown or the households where disciples go, the reality is named that not everyone or every place will be ready to receive the proclamation of the nearness of God's reign.

Pastoral Reflections

In returning to Jesus' hometown, to the site of what might be viewed as his "ordinary" life, the beginning of today's gospel opens us to more than the reproachful ways of the community in which he was raised. It offers an opportunity to see more broadly the mistake of judging the familiar as insignificant. Imagine how the story could have broadened had those neighbors let their knowledge of Jesus' everyday life, his full humanity, reshape their understanding of what God can do with the ordinary! But instead of letting that familiarity expand their wonder and deepen their relationship with a God who knows them and wants to know them even better, they write Jesus off.

Maybe that's a piece of why Jesus decides to send the disciples, two by two, carrying nothing that will communicate their distinct pasts and identities. Jesus makes them unfamiliar—travelers without baggage—so that their words and deeds may be comprehended freshly.

Singer-songwriter Carrie Newcomer muses regularly on the power of what is familiar. Have a listen to her "Holy as a Day is Spent" (*Gathering of Spirits*) or consider these lines from her song "Geodes" (*The Geography of Light*):

All these things that we call familiar,
Are just miracles clothed in the commonplace
You'll see it if you try in the next stranger's eyes,
God walks around in muddy boots, sometimes rags
and that's the truth,
You can't always tell, but sometimes you just know...

With this in mind, maybe one part of the story of Jesus' return to Nazareth is pressing us to consider how and when we are like the hometown crowd dismissing what is ordinary and familiar. Do we see miracles "clothed in the commonplace"? Are there familiar characters in our daily lives who are bursting with beauty or profundity to share but **we** just don't see them? What judgments about who or what is special, and who or what is not, must we lay aside if we are to be open and humble enough to recognize, and be helped by, the sacred in the ordinary?

Another stand-out detail of the narrative is the disciples being sent in pairs. Sent on their journeys without all the belongings that are familiar—without the things that usually keep one safe or help one to be recognizable—the disciples are sent with the one thing that matters most: relationship. Nearly

all else is left behind (the bread, the bag, the money in the belts), but they are not sent alone. They are to be companions of one another—sent not only to speak with authority over unclean spirits, but sent in a partnership, to be in community. And, that being *in relationship*? It may well be the best model of the sacred in the ordinary, so let's embrace it fully.

Kari Lipke and Joanne Engquist

July 15, 2018 Pentecost 8/Lectionary 15

Amos 7:7–15

Psalm 85:8–13

Ephesians 1:3–14

Mark 6:14–29

Why don't we ever ask kids to act out this Gospel passage in Vacation Bible School? It's got drama, pathos, dancing! We act out Noah's Ark, although we do stop at the point where God kills everyone that's not in the boat. The children at our congregation love to act out the Good Samaritan, because the pastor gives them permission to "beat up and rob" their friend. Sure, it's playacting, but still...

This is a tragic story from a human perspective: mockery, infidelity, greed, cruelty. This is a tremendous story from a dramatic perspective: mockery, infidelity, greed, cruelty, sex, irony, full of twists and turns. It has all the parts of a *Telenovela* on *Univision*: a jealous lover, multiple levels of betrayal, a bunch of fat cats gorging themselves on the best food, jockeying for favor, and drooling with the host over his daughter's dance.

There was a telenovela a few years back called "Los Ricos También Lloran"—The Rich Also Cry. Maybe some of Herod's guests cried at the sight of the beheaded Baptist; maybe more of them laughed. They were the elite of Galilee—the courtiers, officers, and leaders. They probably didn't care much for a strange prophet from the margins who preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Gossip might have been a staple at Herod's banquets, but repentance was not—and his guests liked a good show, which Herod never failed to provide. Yet, I wonder: in the back of their minds, did they hear another strange prophet from the margins, who warned that "the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste"?

But back to the story. Is there any good news in a beheading? Professors at Christ Seminary-Seminex often said that "you can't get to the good news until you get to the bottom of the bad news." This one's a long, deep slog through human evil. Herod binds and arrests John, an act of capricious power. He does so because his new wife, Herodias, is jealous. Herod has entered into an unrighteous marriage with Herodias, pos-

sibly for geopolitical reasons as much as lust. John the Baptist condemns Herod, yet Herod "liked to listen to him." Even stranger, Herod knows that John was a righteous and holy man, and is afraid of him. Behind Herod's bravado and show of power, there is fear.

So, does Herod seek counsel for that fear? Does he struggle with what is eating him away inside? No, he defaults to the style that got him where he is: playing to the crowd in a grandiose manner. He throws a party for the political, military, and economic elite of Galilee. His daughter does one heck of a dance. (In Mark she is named Herodias and called "his daughter," in Matthew, she is simply "the daughter of Herodias.") Bombastic Herod promises her up to half the kingdom. She goes to her mother: "What should I ask for?" The head of John the Baptist. Cut it off, and we will be free! Echoes of killing Jesus to "save the nation."

But Herodias the Younger doesn't just ask for John's head, but for his head *on a platter*. A symbol of wealth, celebration, and finery becomes the bearer of terror. Plates are for one person to eat from; platters are to serve the crowd. Like her father, like the dance she enticed him with, she is playing to the crowd. She says to them: this head is for you. You are a part of this. Watch me dance now, with the fruits of *our* cruelty. Although she is in no way a prophet, she bears prophetic witness with the platter of John's head: this is not just who my cruel father is, this is who you all are.

Where in our land do we see finery and wealth bearing unspeakable cruelty? Who on the margins are sacrificed, not just for expediency, but to make those in power feel safe?

So how to preach hope out of this horrible story? Pastor Heidi Neumark spoke at our professional retreat last year, and talked about a Bible study at Transfiguration in the Bronx, where every woman had been the victim of some kind of abuse. She shared how she was reluctant to study the truly terrible passages about rape and abuse in the Hebrew Scriptures. But the women told her they wanted to study them, because it was *their* story. They could see themselves in the story, and they could see God in their own story, which helped them heal.

I think a lot of folks in our congregations have experienced humiliation and cruelty—maybe not a beheading of the body, but a beheading of their spirits.

So where *is* the good news? Is it too much of a stretch to state that John—like Jesus who he points to—is a sanctuary for truth, for God's grace? A sanctuary that will be laid waste by evil, as Amos foretold. The forerunner of Jesus, who is laid waste, tortured and lifted up for ridicule and abuse. And yet, that lifting up of Jesus, as Paul says, has given us "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us." Ravished by evil, yet triumphing, lavishing us with grace.

Patrick Cabello Hansel

July 22, 2018

Pentecost 9/Lectionary 16

Jeremiah 23:1–6

Psalm 23

Ephesians 2:11–22

Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

Chapters five and six in Mark are a whirlwind of healing, feeding, casting out demons, and sending the disciples out to a myriad of communities. In the middle of that, Herod beheads John the Baptist, a direct result of Herod hearing about the work of Jesus and his ministry team. Now we dive right back into that work, a mission of crossing boundaries, healing, and teaching. God's mission is not going to be stopped by any ruler, any act of evil. Not even by death.

In these two passages of the Gospel, separated by the feeding of the 5,000, we see the cost of ministry to Jesus and the disciples: “For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” I imagine that most of us have had days or weeks like that. Too often I've skipped lunch or eaten at the computer while working—not good for my stomach, or the computer! I tell myself, and sometimes others, that I'm just “so busy.” But it is a choice I make, sometimes because circumstances require it; more often, because I see myself as indispensable. Which is, frankly, idolatry.

For many of our people, life is burdensome. My wife, Luisa, and I serve a congregation that is mostly immigrants from Latin America. Many of them do shift work, which can change by the week or even the day. Taking time off for a church retreat can mean losing 20 percent or more of their weekly pay. Still, they make sure their children are fed and healthy, go to their school conferences, serve through the church, worry about getting stopped by the police and being asked for their documents, and try to survive with hope, while hateful rhetoric about them swirls all around. That's tiring, to say the least.

Yet it seems that most of them are never too busy to eat! There is always food offered when I visit, and we are invited to every birthday feast. There is something that these immigrant folks know about the liberating power of eating: That sharing whatever you have blesses everyone, in abundance! But that's next week's sermon!

This week's texts are about restoring hope to a world that is scattered and oppressed. Jeremiah speaks God's condemnation to shepherds who were called to protect God's people. “It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.” God doesn't lay the blame on lack of time or resources, or changing cultures and attitudes, or forces beyond our control. God lays the blame on the pastors, the shepherds! Ouch!

But there is hope. God says “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them...” Maybe part of our preaching this week can be a fervent prayer that God will raise up those shepherds in our midst, of all shapes and colors, and musical and culinary tastes.

In Ephesians, Paul points out our alienation: “remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” That last phrase hits me hard every time I read it: no hope, and no God *in the world*. Some days, with bombings of hospitals and schools, with migrants beaten and raped at the border, with transgender people murdered and safety nets shredded, it seems there is no hope, and that God has been pushed out of the world.

“But wait!” Paul says. “...in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” Oh God, grant this to a divided nation and a broken world!

But prayer is not our only duty. Jesus bids the disciples to come and rest, but when the crowd follows, “he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” Note that in this passage, Jesus doesn't solve their problems; rather, he teaches them “many things.” I wish Mark would be a little more specific—what things, exactly? But maybe the teaching is hidden in Jesus' actions: seeking rest, having compassion, teaching the joys and challenges of the kingdom.

Maybe the teaching is also hidden in the crowd's actions. We know that crowds can turn into mobs. But here, the crowd does what believers do: they see, they follow, they recognize, they listen; and in the second half of the Gospel, they beg. They beg for healing.

Paul shows how that healing comes. It is by Christ's flesh, by which “he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” Not by an idea, not even by great teaching, but in his very body. Jesus goes right into the dividing wall, into the swamp of hostility. A clear reference to the cross, but also guidance to find Jesus. For throughout his ministry Jesus goes into poor neighborhoods, into houses of sinners, into the tombs where raging evil has destroyed flesh and spirit.

Jesus hangs on the cross for us, but he also hangs out with all of us, wherever we are.

Patrick Cabella Hansel

July 29, 2018

Pentecost 10/Lectionary 17

2 Kings 4:42–44

Psalm 145:10–18

Ephesians 3:14–21

John 6:1–21

My wife and I planted a congregation in north Philadelphia in the mid-nineties. We were completing our first summer of youth programming and were holding a graduation for the youth and their parents. We had not yet gathered enough people to prepare a meal for the feast, so we went to Freddy and Tony's, a neighborhood restaurant, on Wednesday before the graduation. We told them we were expecting about eighty people on Friday, and the person who took our order told us we would need two salads, two *arroz con gandules* (rice and pigeon peas) and two chickens. We placed the order and continued on with the preparation.

When we went to pick up the order, in the midst of the Friday dinner rush, the staff brought out two large containers of salad, two large containers of rice, and two chickens. Not two large containers of chicken, but two rather little roasted chickens! At that point, they were too busy to prepare more for us. We have never prayed that this gospel story would be manifested in our midst as we did that night! Somehow, everyone ate, as we asked God to multiply the little fowls. I don't think we had any leftovers.

I think most of our hearers have had these miracle experiences—maybe they didn't think of them as miracles, and maybe they didn't see their role in it. Maybe it wasn't as dramatic as feeding 5,000, or even 100. But most of our parishioners can point to happenings where the whole community was blessed through the community's trust of the Spirit of God. Blessed, even when it seems the resources were way too small. What might those have been?

In both of these feeding narratives, a person not named starts the process going. In 2 Kings, it is a man from Baal-shalishah, who brings barley loaves and fresh ears of grain. In John, it is a boy who offers his five loaves and two fish. In both cases, the offering is more than enough. Abundance reigns. In Elisha's case, "they ate and had some left." In Jesus' case, with "the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets." As a writer and a writing teacher, I always emphasize being specific as a way to carry truth and feeling. Kudos to John on the twelve baskets—and to the writer of 2 Kings for specifying twenty loaves of barley!

But seriously folks, perhaps we err if we present these two stories as Elisha and Jesus doing miracles. They do, to be sure; but God's power is working in the community as well. The unnamed boy and the man from Baal-shalishah take a risk

in the presence of the holy. They give what they have. They give *all* that they have, without strings. If the miracle doesn't occur, they probably don't get to eat, either—they have given up control of their possessions and turned them into gifts for the community.

Who are the unnoticed and maybe even unnamed people in our communities who give up control of their possessions (time, strength, wisdom) and turn them into gifts for the community?

Elisha does a lot of feeding and saving in chapter four. He multiplies the oil of a widow of one of his company of prophets, saving her sons from slavery. He purifies the cursed pot of stew at Gilgal. He also receives food gracefully from the Shunammite woman and raises her son from death. Then Elisha and his company are fed by a man from Baal-shalishah. (If I could rap, Baal-shalishah would be my refrain this Sunday!)

Elisha is known, but who starts the miracle? Even with famine in the land, the man from Baal-shalishah brings his first fruits to the Lord to feed God's servants. (According to the Talmud (Sanh. 12a) the fruits of the earth nowhere ripened so quickly as in Baal-shalishah.). In the midst of radical scarcity, the unnamed man practices radical abundance.

A faithful act in the face of despair.

Most of the great changes we celebrate today—and maybe take for granted—started small, and at great cost to the people—often "unnamed" who began them. Our daughters—a millennial and a Generation Whatever Comes Next—have grown up in neighborhoods with no majority ethnic group. They are light years ahead of many of us in their welcome and trust of LGBTQ people.

They learned about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. and Harvey Milk in school. But I doubt they heard about the thousands who came before, who risked beatings, bombings, and death, to begin the movements that have brought change. People whose names we don't know. People who brought bread and gave it to the holy, gave it to the people.

I can't explain how these feeding miracles unfolded. I barely comprehend how the miracles of justice and freedom happened. But thanks be to God, with Paul I can say, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name."

Patrick Cabello Hansel

August 5, 2018

Pentecost 11/Lectionary 18

Exodus 16:2–4, 9–15

Psalm 78:23–29

Ephesians 4:1–6

John 6:24–35

Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven,

He rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven.

Mortals ate of the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance.

—*Psalm 78:23–25*

What's it?

“**W**hat's it?” wondered the band of newly liberated slaves, illegal aliens escaped from Egypt, now wanderers in the wilderness of Sinai. What is this stuff, this “fine, flakey substance, as fine as frost on the ground” that God had sent them in response to their incessant grumbling over the growling in their stomachs that led to the mutinous complaint against Moses and Aaron, their YHWH-appointed leaders? “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” And so YHWH sent quails in the evening and manna in the morning, which as Moses explained, “is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat (vv 13–15). “Manna,” as the “flakey substance” came to be called, simply takes its name from the Israelite's question, the word meaning literally “what's it?”

Truth to tell, as the Book of Numbers further explains, manna itself grew old fast to the tastes of these galloping gourmets (who knows what happened to the quails?), and we find the Israelites, in a passage we'll be hearing in a couple of months, complaining now of the unrelenting menu of manna. Here the yearning for the fleshpots of Egypt while beginning with the lament, “If we only had meat to eat!” expands to include: “We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic”—oh, the garlic!—“but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at” (11:4-6). That's gratitude for you, which goes to show that even such “bread from heaven,” as Jesus will call manna in today's Gospel reading, quickly can grow stale and taken-for-granted in the mouths of YHWH's fussy people. And YHWH can grow angry at the ingratitude and presumptuousness of the specially chosen people as well.

Jesus' discourse on the bread of life in John 6, which we'll be hearing read for the next four Sundays, begins with his accosting the crowd for pursuing him across the Sea of Galilee, not because of the “sign” he had performed in the feeding of the 5,000 but simply because “you ate your fill of the loaves,” as Jesus says. Or, as we saw last week, at the conclusion of the story of the miraculous feeding, satisfying empty stomachs was sufficient for the people to want to “take him by force to make him king”(vv 26, 15)—Herod's worst nightmare! No wonder that Jesus then turns the occasion of his recent feeding of the crowd into a teaching moment as he urges them, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” And then to their plea for a sign, Jesus offers the story of YHWH providing the people with manna in the wilderness—“bread from heaven to eat” (vv 27, 31) which he reminds them came not through Moses but from God, who now offers them “the true bread from heaven” which “gives life to the world.” To this they reply, “Sir, give us this bread always,” to which Jesus counters, sounding with his “I AM” more than a bit like YHWH from the burning bush, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

Here the people's chronically self-serving, ingratitude-inflected question “What's it?” becomes the sign, the occasion for Jesus' self-identification with the great “I AM” who is not only the world's creator but its continuing source of nurture and sustenance: the bread of life.

Taking it all a step further, our Ephesians text employs the Pauline metaphor of the body for the church (see Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12) which is fed and thrives by the nurturance of God's love given in Christ Jesus. Moreover it is a unitive nourishment that God provides freely that issues in the seven-fold oneness that is the crowning affirmation of Ephesians, which has justly been called “the epistle of Christian unity”: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all and through all and in all” (vv 16, 4). Get it? One-ness in Christ!

Suitable hymns abound including the contemporary “Bread of Life from Heaven” (*ELW* #474) set to a traditional Argentinian refrain with stanzas composed by Marty Haugen and words by Susan Briehl. This could be used as a hymn repeated throughout the next several weeks, or with verses added week by week. Or try “Lord, Who the Night You Were Betrayed” (*ELW* #463) whose refrain sings well the message of Ephesians, “may we all one bread, one body be, through this blest sacrament of unity.”

John Rollefson

August 12, 2018

Pentecost 12/Lectionary 19

1 Kings 19:4–8

Psalm 34:1–8

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

John 6:35, 41–51

O taste and see that the Lord is good

—*Psalm 34:8a*

Beyond Truthiness

Our month-long slog through the wordy bog of Jesus' Bread of Life discourse continues where we left off last week at v 35 with the first of what Archbishop William Temple once called "the seven parables of the Lord's Person," all introduced by the words "I am." These include in order of appearance: I am the Bread of Life (vi, 35); I am the Light of the World (vii, 12); I am the Door of the Sheep (x, 7); I am the Good Shepherd (x, 11); I am the Resurrection and the Life (xi, 25); I am the True Vine (xv, 1); and I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (xiv,6).¹ I appreciate Temple's inference that the "I Am" sayings of Jesus pronounced egoistically constitute a kind of metaphorical alternative to Jesus' synoptic parables declared with riddling reference to the third person kingdom of heaven/God but in similarly sapiential style.

Now having claimed to be the bread of life which he offered in last week's verses as something far greater even than God's own manna in the days of the people's wanderings in the Sinai wilderness, Jesus deepens the perplexity of his hearers by claiming, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." That claim immediately sets them to wondering how this could be so: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know?" It's a puzzle reminiscent of Jesus' encounter in Luke with his home town folks in Nazareth where he had been raised (Luke 4:22–23). They also assumed they knew all they needed to know about Jesus' origins.

In v 41 and following John begins to refer to Jesus' questioners as "the Jews" or in Greek "*oi Ioudaioi*." I have sometimes substituted "the Judeans" for "the Jews" to reduce the anti-Jewish sound of the language in John's gospel, taking care to explain my reasoning. Here the work of Raymond E. Brown on the Gospel and Epistles of John and the wider Johannine community is an important resource in helping to understand the origin of the anti-Jewish language in the Fourth Gospel. "The Jews" is a term used by John to describe that element of

life in the synagogue that opposed the Gospel about Jesus and made life difficult for the Johannine community of believers who had plenty of their own internal divisions.

The disputatious character of Jesus' discourse in John 6 is a reminder that there will always be a market in the church for the message of Ephesians we've been hearing, beginning with last week's paranesis regarding "speaking the truth in love" as a sign of the unitive gift of the Spirit. Today we hear "putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors," which involves "let(ting) no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up" as well as "put(ting) away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice," instead "be(ing) kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (4:15a, 25, 29, 31–32).

Amid a time in our nation when evidence of "truth-telling" is rare in our public life (especially sadly in self-described "evangelical" circles that belie the true meaning of the word) and "truthiness," as Stephen Colbert has termed public phony-ness, is epidemic, it is reassuring to hear Jesus himself, amid his dispute, underline his own commitment to the truth with the interjection, "Amen. Amen" (v 47a). "Verily, Verily," the *AV* used to translate this which our *NRSV* has updated to "very truly." It's Jesus' way of marking his words with a special kind of divine veracity similar perhaps, to the commonly found Old Testament prophets' truth-establishing phrase "thus says the Lord."

In the very closing verse of our lection, we find Jesus reiterating his by now familiar declaration with the only slightly amended: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," adding the implication that he will expand on in next week's text, "Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (v 51). As we'll be seeing, this serves to raise the temperature and tempers of Jesus' opponents but also opens a further dimension of his discourse, which some have termed "eucharistic." Robert Smith sees it as a "jarring" transition in which Jesus moves from claiming for himself what might have been interpreted as being a kind of "nurturing" presence as the "bearer of divine wisdom" to a much fleshier and eventually bloodier claim of being our risen and wounded Lord, who is "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."²

John Rollefson

1. William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse Barlow, 1985) 76.

2. Robert Smith, *Wounded Lord*, (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 70–71.

August 19, 2018

Pentecost 13/Lectionary 20

Proverbs 9:1–6

Psalms 34:9–14

Ephesians 5:15–20

John 6:51–58

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the
fear of the Lord.

—*Psalms 34:11*

Wisdom's Feast

This Sunday offers a rare opportunity to let the wisdom tradition within scripture take the lead as we hear the lovely lection from Proverbs 9 that is sometimes called “Wisdom’s Feast.” It allows us to hear the readings from Ephesians and John as well as our psalmody with ears especially attuned to how the Word for today is being played in the key of wisdom, that minor strain of biblical literature that is chiefly thought of in terms of writings like Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Job. But wisdom is also at home in the New Testament in places like James, Ephesians, Colossians, and the Gospel of John where Jesus is portrayed as the great teacher or rabbi whom we find declaring today, cryptically enough, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. . . .” (v 51a). Rather than by means of “signs” as in John, the synoptic gospels also portray Jesus as one who teaches by means of riddling parables, using the most common, everyday things of life to evoke the secret of the kingdom of heaven/God.³

Wisdom, from a biblical perspective, is the fruit of reflection upon human experience in the light of God’s living Word—and so it is not a human accomplishment but is the gift of God’s Spirit. Today’s reading from Ephesians contains a good example of the “paranetic,” advice-giving character of the wisdom tradition: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish (the antonym of wise) but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery but be filled with the Spirit” (vv 15–18)—the discerning Spirit of God’s wisdom. Wisdom is good advice raised to a higher degree, uncommonly good because godly sense.

One of the intriguing aspects of the figure of Wisdom in scripture is that wisdom is not only a feminine noun but is

3. For a biblical theology especially attuned to the wisdom tradition within scripture see Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

portrayed as a woman—even as God’s “consort” or “darling child” in a passage like Proverbs 8 in which Wisdom is “at once the delight of the creator and the companion of human beings” while also being “a member of the family of God,” as Terrien puts it. The prologue to John’s gospel sounds like a wisdom hymn to the eternal Word with echoes of Proverbs’ reference to the preexistent Wisdom, “begotten not made.”⁴

In today’s brief reading from Proverbs 9, Wisdom is an enthusiastic hostess who has carefully set her table, planned and prepared her multi-course meal, chosen and decanted her wine all in readiness to welcome guests to her table. Who are the guests? She delegates the task of figuring this out to her servant girls who are sent into the town with the open invitation, “You that are simple, turn in here!” and to those “without sense” she beckons, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (vv 3–6). It is a metaphor, an image, after all, that Proverbs is offering us that we too—simple and without sense as we may be—are especially welcomed to Wisdom’s feast.

Christians cannot hear of Wisdom’s feast without thinking of Jesus, his characteristic table fellowship with the religiously excluded, his feeding of the 5,000, his parable of the great banquet/wedding feast, and his final meal with his friends, which the church would commemorate ever after at Jesus’ command. Around the table we trust Jesus’ words—as in today’s Gospel reading—that in this simple meal of bread and wine, a true eating and drinking of Jesus’ own flesh and blood is being experienced in which the original host himself becomes the meal—the living bread come down from heaven. It is not hard to imagine that Proverbs 9 may well have been one of Jesus’ favorite passages from his people’s scriptures.⁵

“Turn in here”—Wisdom’s invitation to her banquet—might be taken up by the church as our invitation to others to “come and see” what it is that is on offer here. And thanks to Ephesians we’re promised that this matter of being filled with the Spirit of wisdom has certain other outcomes as well as feasting on the bread of life, one of which is music, or if you will, participatory song. “Be filled with the Spirit,” our lection closes, “as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv 18b–20). Now that’s true “eucharist” in its original meaning of “thanksgiving.” Try the newish hymn “We Eat the Bread

4. Ibid., 356–357. See also Terrien’s *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 88 ff.

5. On the importance of philoxenia, usually translated as “hospitality” to the ministry of Jesus see John Koenig’s important study, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

of Teaching" (*ELW* #518), which sings of how "Wisdom calls throughout the city,/knows our hunger, and in pity/gives her loving invitation/to the banquet of salvation."

John Rollefson

August 26, 2018 Pentecost 14/Lectionary 21

Joshua 24:1–2a, 14–18

Psalm 34:15–22

Ephesians 6:10–20

John 6:56–69

The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the
crushed in spirit...

The Lord redeems the life of his servants...

—*Psalm 34:18, 22a*

"Do You Also Wish to Go Away?"

For five weeks now we've been working our way through the sixth chapter of John that consists largely of Jesus' l-o-n-g soliloquy on what it means for him to claim "*I am the bread of life*." Today Jesus ends his sermon—as all sermons must finally end—and it's at least reassuring to us preacher-types that even Jesus' sermons didn't always receive a polite and positive hearing.

In fact, John reports, "When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' (v 60). The Greek word translated as "difficult" is "*skleros*"—like "sclerosis" in English—but in Greek it can also mean "dry" as well as "hard." Its connotations also include, my lexicon tells me, "harsh" or "rough," "stiff" or "stark," "austere" or "stern." "Too tough to swallow," I'd translate it. The *NRSV's* "difficult" is just too wishy-washy. "A rough, crude teaching. Who wants to hear that?" I imagine his disciples saying. Please notice that it's Jesus' own disciples—not the crowd, nor "the Jews"—but his own followers and friends who find his teaching about the bread of life, and especially about the need for them to "eat my flesh and drink my blood" (v 56) too hard to swallow (forgive the pun). I still recall years ago an older, much respected pastor objecting to words he found too graphic in the refrain of what was then a contemporary hymn, "Eat my body, drink my blood." The words still have the power to offend the faithful.

But Jesus, being a good teacher, asks his disciples—I like to think with a slight smile creasing his face—"Does this offend you?" Again, a weak translation, for the Greek literally says, "Does this scandalize you? Do you find this a stumbling

block?" Indeed it must have, for John tells us that "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him." This matter of eating his flesh and drinking his blood apparently was the straw that broke the camel's back for some who had counted themselves among his followers. So Jesus turned to the twelve, the inner circle among his disciples, and asks them with what one commentator calls "unsettling directness": "Do you also wish to go away?"

I imagine Jesus asking the question sadly, sighing as his shoulders sagged a little, as he saw one-time followers in whom he'd invested a great deal of himself shaking their heads in disbelief or dissatisfaction or whatever it is that disillusion folks who'd once shown excitement and commitment. I've seen it in church members who get mad or frustrated about something or someone and threaten to leave, or just stop coming and won't even make the effort to explain why. Jesus' question, "So you also want to go away?" makes him sound almost pathetic, doesn't it?

But, to be honest, there are times when I myself have been tempted to answer "Yep" to Jesus' question. Yep, I've had it with this church business—enough prejudice, enough injustice, enough hard-headedness, enough stinginess, enough guilt over my own inadequacies or mistakes, enough seemingly endless church meetings—like when our Synod Assembly couldn't even manage to pass a resolution against torture!

"Do you also wish to go away?" Jesus asks. But the question isn't one he invented. It really goes back to Adam and Eve in the garden and, as Jesus himself suggests in John 6, is epitomized in Israel's wilderness wanderings only made possible by YHWH's life-sustaining gift of manna—about which the Israelites incessantly complained—culminating in today's climactic story from the book of Joshua. "Choose this day whom you will serve," Joshua urges the people at a critical juncture in their history, but "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (v 15). "You gotta' serve somebody," Bob Dylan taught us to sing during his brief evangelical phase. "It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you gotta' serve somebody." But Israel's well-meaning if sanctimonious opting for YHWH, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods" (v 16), once again reveals that our human choosing is never the final word, however good the intentions. Only God's choosing to remain loyal to the covenant promises is finally what matters, hard as the prophets will try to remind Israel and us of our covenantal responsibilities.

Should we be surprised that it's Simon Peter who steps forward to answer Jesus' question, "Do you also wish to go away?" with words we join him in singing weekly as our Gospel acclamation, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. . . ." (v 68).

As our reading from Ephesians reminds us, "our struggle

is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” (v 12).

“I Am the Bread of Life” (*ELW* #485) is one of very few communion hymns to sing directly of our eating of Christ’s flesh and drinking of his blood in a close paraphrase of today’s Gospel text.

John Rollefson

September 2, 2018 Pentecost 15/Lectionary 22

Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9

Psalm 15

James 1:17–27

Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

Engaging the Texts

Psalm 15 is considered a liturgical psalm and functions as an entrance liturgy, or what we might refer to as a Call to Worship. It begins with a question that asks who is worthy of worship. This sounds a bit like a litmus test or approval for entrance. The psalm continues with a list of ethical actions and behaviors the best of us could not attain. At the end of the psalm we are left with the impossibility of reaching a state of security: “Whoever does these things will always be secure.”

This psalm doesn’t square with our Lutheran bent toward grace, radical welcome, and being a mash up of saint and sinner all at the same time. Perhaps the invitation is to find our security in God who is true, keeps promises, does justice, and can be counted on. We are to be reflections of what God mirrors for us.

This Sunday offers a wonderful opportunity to see this psalm as part of the liturgy. Rearrange the words to be read responsively. Begin with an opening question and welcome, followed by confession and forgiveness. Be creative. Include the psalmist’s text in the closing blessing. Though this psalm functions as an entrance to worship, it refers to our lives and actions in the world. Psalm 15 reminds us the walls of the sanctuary are porous; there should be little obstruction between worship and the world. We exit to serve.

Here’s an example:

Lord, who may enter your sanctuary; who may worship you?

Those who are upright in word and deed, those who do and obey the will of God.

Loving God, we come before you, confessing the ways we are ill-prepared to worship you.

When we don’t do what is right,

God forgive us.

When the words we speak are untrue or insincere, when we lie about others,

God forgive us.

When we do wrong to our friends, when we spread rumors about our neighbors,

God forgive us.

When we have not honored those who live out their faith,

God forgive us.

When we have failed to help those in need, when we have not acted for justice, when we have not shared our resources, which come from you,

God forgive us.

God intends for us to find our security and hope in God, and yearns for us to care for our neighbor. You are forgiven and loved. In Christ you are saved and made whole. Every day is a new beginning, a new opportunity to practice our faith active in love.

Amen.

Benediction

Go in peace, into the world God so loves

Be truthful in word and deed

Be kind toward your neighbor

Give of yourself and your treasure with an abundant heart

May the God of all grace, strengthen and guide you all your days.

Amen

Pastoral Reflections

There are people who are just plain good with words. Poets express the contours of human existence. Prophets inspire hope for the disenfranchised. Storytellers move listeners and reveal universal truths. Philosophers ask probing questions and provide sophisticated answers. Children blurt out the truth, like the three-year-old leaving communion after receiving a blessing, “Why don’t I get to have Jesus?” Songwriters with their lyrics store the treasures of faith.

Words inspire. Words change the world. Words destroy and hurt. Words create chasms. Words lead to war. For most

of us even our best efforts with words can fall flat. We are afraid of saying the wrong thing when someone is grieving; we withhold a truth when it feels too risky. We avoid being honest and speak sideways.

Martin Luther did not like the words found in the book of James. Verses such as: “*Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves,*” drove him up a wall. Luther wished the short book stricken from the canon.

Yet, the little book of James is still here. (Luther didn’t have the last word!) Today’s texts are about living faith with integrity—matching words with actions, aligning our hearts to God’s heart where justice and compassion are organic expressions of faith, where one’s faith and beliefs are consonant with one’s actions.

Today’s texts encourage Christians to walk the walk we talk, to keep at the heart of our values the laws of God, to be doers of the word, not merely hearers. There is no such thing as personal religion. Religion, the life of faith, is necessarily public; its purpose is to care for orphans and widows in their distress. These texts call us to come out of our quiet faith closets and let the light of Christ shine, in full view, in word and deed.

In Mark we find a frustrated Jesus who sees others so caught up in proper rituals and rules that the heart of God is forgotten. Jesus turns the purity system with its abrasive social boundaries on its head and offers a radically different social vision.

We are Christians in the making, in need of practice. We gather and worship, not because *we* are faithful, but because God is faithful to us. God takes the stuff of our lives, the good and the evil, the unevenness of it all, gathers it up, and places it in God’s grace-filled hands. God does not give up on us, on the world, on the church. God is faithful and persistent. God’s words are true. God’s heart is overflowing with compassion for each of us.

Mary Halvorson

September 9, 2018 Pentecost 16/Lectionary 23

Isaiah 35:4–7a

Psalm 146

James 2:1–10, (11–13), 14–17

Mark 7:24–37

Engaging the Texts

James challenges us with the question, how can you hold forth faith in Christ and behave in a way that discriminates against others? “It’s quite easy,” is the uncomfortable answer.

We do it all the time. The writer of James is concerned with Christian conduct and living. This letter is a manual for how to live the life of faith—practical, specific, challenging. It is concerned not with proper beliefs, but with proper living that goes hand-in-hand with faith in the God known in Christ.

The Syrophenician woman in Mark takes a huge leap and publically challenges Jesus into a widened understanding of God’s realm. She pushes, challenges, and ultimately teaches him that a Gentile foreigner can be invited to the table. She is worthy of breadcrumbs and more; she is included in God’s circle of grace. The ripples of God’s love are always stretching us to go further, to risk more, to err on the side of love. It’s all undergirded with God’s grace, which is the starting line, which is the finishing point.

Just after this story, Jesus heals a deaf man then follows with the feeding of the four thousand. At this meal no food was withheld, no one went hungry, no one had to beg for crumbs; there were even leftovers to take home in Ziploc bags. Interesting. Makes me think the Syrophenician woman was one of those mentors in the faith we find in our congregations. Their witness and persistence make us better pastors and preachers. They push us into spiritual and sometimes painful growth, and unleash in us deepened compassion. They hold us accountable to what we preach, to what Jesus would have us do and be.

The woman of Tyre had nothing to lose; she was already at the bottom of the social rung, and everything to lose in the death of her daughter. As a fierce mother she had faith in what Jesus could provide for her daughter. She would not give up until he was true to his calling. Jesus is busted by her faith and responds with healing. And this made him a better Jesus.

Years ago when I preached on this text I did a crazy thing. I had Ziploc bags, each one holding a chunk of a bagel. I punctuated my sermon with ... “and even the _____ deserve crumbs.” Then I threw bags into the congregation and people caught them. One hit the ceiling and fell onto the lap of a gracious ninety-year-old.

Pastoral Reflections

The novel *March* by Geraldine Brooks is a portrayal of the Civil War. The protagonist is a father of three daughters who volunteers as a military chaplain. As a young man he peddles books in Virginia. As he meanders through a small town, he notices a Bible study going on and joins in. The little clapboard church stands next to a courtyard where slaves are put up for auction. It just so happens a sale is taking place. As he sits in the church Mr. March hears with one ear the good news, and with the other ear, the resonant voice of the auctioneer starting the bidding process for two slaves. As the Bible studiers contemplate the teachings of Jesus, the voice

outside is selling two children who had been torn from their mother and are standing terrified on the auction block. His thoughts fly to the verse, “Suffer the little children to come unto me.” Had he the means, he would have marched out and bought those children their freedom.

What is most striking to this young man who had not yet entered seminary, was no one else in the church seemed to notice what was going on outside. When the pastor asks for money to send Bibles to Africa, the young man can bear it no longer. “How it is the Good News is not sent more cheaply to the young children on the auction block next door?” He is greeted with hisses and a cold request that he leave, which he does, with no regret.

The idea of a Bible study taking place while children stand on the auction block to be sold sounds preposterous. We would never allow this to happen in our time. We’ve surely evolved beyond auction blocks and separating mothers from their children, haven’t we? We would have stood up and stopped the madness and saved the children. We would not show partiality and welcome the rich, smartly dressed, non-immigrant person into our sanctuaries—while leaving out the dirty, troubled, poor souls. Sarcasm aside, keeping my faith congruent with my actions is a daily struggle and tension. Every day I fail, every day I miss, omit, or avoid an opportunity. Just how are we to live out our faith in light of the real-life auction blocks outside the church windows?

One thing is sure: we need to claim and confess a searing kind of honesty. I’m part of the problem that allows the auction blocks of our time to continue. We all come as beggars to the table in need of God’s grace.

William Sloane Coffin describes God’s love: it is poured out universally on everyone from the pope to the loneliest wino on the planet; and secondly God’s love doesn’t seek value, it creates value. It’s not because we have value that we are loved, but because we are loved that we have value.

Mary Halvorson

September 16, 2018 Pentecost 17/Lectionary 24

Isaiah 50:4–9a

Psalms 116:1–9

James 3:1–12

Mark 8:27–38

Engaging the Texts

For many congregations, September heralds the return of confirmation classes, Sunday school, adult enrichment programs, and intergenerational education. It is fitting then

that this week’s texts focus on the power, joy, and perils of teaching. While we often think of teaching as helping others learn about God, these texts reframe teaching as the proclamation of who God is for you. Our teaching is never about God in general but about who God has decided to be for us in Jesus Christ.

Our Isaiah text views teaching as a prophetic act. God has given the author the ability to teach in order to sustain the weary with a word. Good teachers don’t just impart information; they change how we view ourselves and what we think is possible in the world. Our ordinary acts of teaching and consolation can be conduits of the extraordinary mercy of God. But as the author knew well, teaching that instills hope or promises change is always met with resistance.

While teaching comes with great potential, it also comes with equally heavy responsibilities. The vivid imagery of the James text shows how seemingly minor changes in teaching can lead to dramatic changes over time. Consider, for example, how many of our most deeply entrenched ideas about God were the first things we were taught about God. James also notes that our teaching about God needs to be aligned with our practices toward others. Poor teaching and praxis can lead people away from the mercy of God, but good teaching can also create faith in the promises of God. Faced with those alternatives, what choice do we have but to bless God, trust the Spirit, and teach boldly?

Mark’s take on teaching is embedded not only in the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples but also in the setting of their discussion. Caesarea Philippi was a hub of trade, cultural capital, and pagan religious practices. When Peter rebukes Jesus’ teaching about his coming death, it is this worldview that Peter is trying to hold on to. Peter wants a Jesus who conquers, not a Jesus who is crucified. But despite Jesus’ infamous rebuke of Peter’s desire, Peter is not cut out of Jesus’ care. In Mark’s Easter gospel, Peter is even explicitly named as someone who needs to be told about Jesus’ resurrection. Faith formation is a lifelong process, full of stops and starts, joys and struggles. Even when we struggle to catch up to where God is calling us, God keeps on calling us by name.

Pastoral Reflections

The idea that faith is something people can pick up on their own is deeply embedded in our language. In Kenda Creasy Dean’s book *Almost Christian*, she notes that we “teach” young people *baseball*, but we “*expose*” them to faith.⁶ Likewise, we often assume that faith is a private matter that emerges from within us. But faith is something that emerges

6. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

from encounter both with the scriptural witness and a community of support.

Growing in faith is not always easy. In Mark's text, Jesus teaches Peter about his mission and purpose by rejecting his desire for a messiah who takes power over others. Jesus even makes a point of getting his disciples' attention before he rebukes Peter. A sermon could explore how we grow in faith not just by learning more but by leaving some of our ideas behind. This is the far more difficult part of learning. It's easy to learn new facts and bits of trivia, but it's far more difficult to admit that an idea you had about God or the church was misguided. And yet, Mark suggests, sometimes we need to have our ideas about God rebuked. What ideas, practices, and assumptions do we need to have rebuked? When was the last time you changed your mind about God? How do we rebuke pastorally?

Another sermon might focus on the nature of Peter's desire for a messiah who is revealed in glory instead of on a cross. Peter wants a messiah who is revealed in the corridors of influence in Caesarea Philippi instead of a cross on Golgotha. What Jesus rejects is Peter's suggestion that Jesus take on the powers that be by their own methods. Peter is so startled by Jesus' talk about his death that he doesn't even hear the promise of resurrection Jesus proclaims. Our worldview is so constrained by the reality of death that we, like Peter, need to be taught to listen for the promise of resurrection.

The Isaiah text suggests that teaching will often be met with resistance. Luther's own life provides one well-known example of how teaching that challenges authority is met with opposition. Or consider the Highlander Folk School, which trained Rosa Parks and many other activists during the civil rights movement. Highlander was an intellectual catalyst of the movement and one of the few places in the south where integrated meetings were held. After being smeared in the press, the school was closed by the state of Tennessee in 1961. The Isaiah text invites us not only to teach truthfully, but also to pray that God would open our ears so that we can engage in the task of prophetic listening.

Joseph Shattauer-Paille

September 23, 2018 Pentecost 18/Lectioary 25

Jeremiah 11:18–20

Psalm 54

James 3:13—4:3, 7–8a

Mark 9:30–37

Engaging the Texts

This week's texts are full of drama. We hear a desperate plea for help, a rousing admonition for obedience, and an obnoxious argument among the disciples. But beneath the varied surface of all our readings is a concern for what it means to be obedient and what it means to have power.

The reading from Jeremiah is a lament and a petition for God's aid. Jeremiah's call for repentance, no surprise, has not been heeded. Even worse, the residents of Anathoth, his hometown, have set out to kill him. Jeremiah is not a self-appointed messenger—the message he carries is not of his own making. Since God commissioned Jeremiah for this prophetic task, Jeremiah expects that God will carry him through it. The vivid language of the lamb suggests this includes physical protection, but it also means being declared righteous by God in the presence of Jeremiah's persecutors.

It is easy to imagine Jeremiah making an exhortation much like that in this week's James text. The reading begins with a challenge to those who consider themselves wise and understanding. Many of us associate wisdom with perceptiveness or discernment. But for James, the true sign of wisdom is gentleness. The wisdom of the world, he suggests, is ultimately selfish and coercive, while the wisdom of God is peaceable and willing to yield. When we seek to get an edge on others, we create cycles of destruction. But by seeking peace, James claims, we reap a "harvest of righteousness" (v 18). The exhortation culminates with an admonition to resist the devil by submitting to God. Wisdom may be exhibited as gentleness, but it is built on trust in God's mercy.

It is that kind of wisdom that the disciples in Mark's gospel are not exhibiting. They fail to understand Jesus' prediction of his death and are too afraid to ask, yet still argue about who is the greatest disciple. Jesus responds to their hubris not by chiding them but by explaining that the greatest is the one who serves the least. The child is significant because children had little social standing and were entirely dependent on others. The ones who are the greatest, Jesus suggests, are those who welcome and stand alongside those who are considered the least. In his correction of the disciples' misguided argument, Jesus also offers a way to understand the meaning of his passion. By dying alongside those who are considered the least, the magnitude of God's solidarity with us and compassion for us are revealed.

Pastoral Reflections

Today's Gospel text is too often used as a proof-text to justify kids' full participation in the liturgical life of the congregation. While well-intentioned, such a reading strips away much of the text's original meaning and robs it of much of its power. The child is important as an example of someone with no real status in society. While the disciples argue over who has the most status, Jesus shows us that his mission is oriented toward those with the least.

This may be a story that we have to tell differently. I serve a congregation in suburban New Jersey where it is hard to overstate the status that kids have. Many people in our community have rearranged their lives around their kids' interests, an idea that would have struck the disciples as bizarre. In our context, it is often people who have chosen not to have children, people who cannot have children, and people who live alone who have the least status. Who are the people in your context who are the easiest to ignore? It is these people and those who welcome them whom Jesus considers to be the greatest.

While status and power are not mentioned in our text from James, it is hard to read the text without thinking about them. As a result, contemporary readers will likely have mixed feelings about James' exhortation. On the one hand, many of us spend a great deal of time seeking wisdom from friends, elders, and mentors. For James to suggest that wisdom is "peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, [and] full of good fruits" will resonate with many (v 17). Yet we may recoil from his admonition to "submit yourselves" to God (v 7). Many of us find the language of "submission" misguided, unhelpful, or even harmful. Countless women have been counseled to submit to their abusive husbands. Many people have submitted to regressive church teachings or coercive leaders. Our desire for agency and autonomy seems to stand in sharp contradiction to submission. Can the language of submission be redeemed or does it need to be pruned out of our vocabulary?

The Jeremiah text may offer a way out of the impasse. Jeremiah is also dealing with the problem of submission but within the frame of Israel and Judah's covenant with God. In that covenant, submission does not take away agency and autonomy but leads to the proper use of it. The people's refusal to submit to the covenant has not improved their situation but has created rampant inequality and injustice. Jeremiah's plea for help is not just for his own safety but also so that his message might be heard and the people would return to their covenant with God. Paired with Jeremiah's call to obedience is a promise that within the covenant is the restoration of personal agency and communal flourishing.

Joseph Shattauer Paille

September 30, 2018 Pentecost 19/Lectionary 26

Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29

Psalm 19:7–14

James 5:13–20

Mark 9:38–50

The name of the book of Numbers in Hebrew is "In the Wilderness." The book narrates the time between liberation and arrival in the promised land. The people are "on the way" to their destination. Daniel Erlander has labeled this time as "the wilderness school."⁷ The people are practicing what it's like to be a people of faith, which always sounds better in theory than it does when it must be lived in community.

It's only been three days since the people left Mount Sinai. Already there is a "rabble" who actively stir up the people's discontent. Moses is overwhelmed by the challenge and is ready quit. Leadership in the covenant community is hard. Sometimes it's tough to believe that a loving God can call good people into a ministry that's so exasperating. Perhaps Moses would have benefited from Clinical Pastoral Education. He's taken on too much. He assumes that God's work is his work and that he's responsible for the people's happiness.

The solution, of course, is to share and distribute the responsibility, the challenge, and the power of leadership. This is part of what the covenant community begins to learn in the wilderness. God's people are not to be led only by one charismatic leader but by many, all of whose names we don't even learn. This theme is played out both in the Gospel text and in the reading from James, where leadership is assumed to be communal, collaborative, and relational.

This is underscored as the story in Numbers progresses. The seventy are gathered at the center of the camp where holiness is constellated. They are given a portion of Moses' Spirit, yet this power is immediately misunderstood as a privilege, something to be controlled and protected. As it turns out, there are two poetic prophets with rhyming names who get the same Spirit even though they are outside the boundaries of holiness. Eldad and Medad, located among the people, perhaps even near the rabble, get the Spirit, too.

This bothers Joshua and his seventy comrades. They demand that this power from the edges and boundaries, be silenced. Yet Moses now takes his place as the extraordinary leader, wishing out loud that all God's people might be filled with prophetic and spiritual power.

7. Daniel Erlander, *Manna and Mercy: A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe* (The Order of Saints Martin and Teresa, Mercer Island, Washington, 1972), 7.

This is also the issue in the Gospel text in Mark. The disciples are disturbed that someone else is doing the work of God's commonwealth. All along the disciples had been looking for a way to make themselves great. The reader of the Gospel should give their best whine when reading verse 38. Doesn't being with Jesus make us entitled to be special? Doesn't being a follower of Jesus set us apart from the rabble, the ones who don't have our insider-y wisdom? Both Jesus and Moses are willing to recognize God's work in whoever embodies it. They see the commonwealth of God as something wider, larger, and more productive than even they can see.

The reading from James trains our eyes on where to look: where there is cheerfulness, hope, concern for the suffering, healing, forgiveness, prayer, and a commitment to reconciliation. This may be an important message for our interfaith, multicultural, multiethnic world: God's project of mercy, love, justice, and compassion is already at work in more complex and effective ways than even the God-chosen institutions can manage. God's prophetic and spiritual power runs both *within* the structured arrangements for leadership and *outside* its boundaries. The church would be wise to recognize both these dynamics, trusting that faithfulness comes as they are held together.

Without this wider lens, power becomes privileged entitlement that will most inevitably be a stumbling block, both for those who have it and those who don't. Unrecognized privilege may well be the millstone around the neck of the church, at least the white church. Certainly, it is the stumbling block that has caused many "little ones" to experience suffering, rejection, pain, and injustice.

For those with privilege, this is hard work. When you've been at the center or near enough to the top to believe you deserve it, there's loss in discovering that faithfulness inevitably means leaving something behind, even becoming disabled for the sake of the gospel. Cutting off those things that give us a leg up feels like a kind of amputation. It feels like entering life only half-able to participate. Yet, this is precisely what the economic, political, and cultural systems do to many already.

Mark seems to be suggesting that listening to voices outside the established boundaries or being willing see God's work happening around us is exactly how we begin to avoid becoming arrogant, privileged stumbling stones. This is part of our work "on the way" to Jerusalem or the promised land or anywhere the church is headed. The only way that we stop being stumbling blocks is to listen to the people who are drowning under the weight of oppression, violence, inequality, and political structures that give power to some and not to others; nations or communities that operate with the same arrogant standards as the fearful seventy or the grandiose twelve. Oh, that all people could prophesy with that vision!

Bradley Schmeling

October 7, 2018 Pentecost 20/Lectionary 27

Genesis 2:18–24

Psalm 8

Hebrews 1:1–4, 2:5–12

Mark 10:2–16

Walter Brueggemann gives a summary of Genesis 2:18–24 that may well serve as a guide for the exploration of today's texts. "The place of the garden is for this covenanted human community of solidarity, trust, and well-being."⁸ These texts suffer if patriarchal frameworks shape their interpretations. The preacher may have to decide whether they can finally be recovered for a gospel sermon. Can they be embraced or must they, for the sake of the gospel, be rejected? In the end, they must lead us to "solidarity, trust, and well-being."

Genesis 2 is part of the second creation story, the older narrative, that feels as if it has been told for generations around the fire. Adam sits in the garden presented with each animal. "Will this one work?" God asks. None of them, porcupines or penguins, quite provide what this earth-creature needs. Yet, he names them, not as a way of establishing dominance, as naming often can, but as a way of entering relationship with them. Although they don't "fit," they are part of the circle of relations that make this garden home and keep Adam human. Eve, the new creation, who stands on her own, is the wonderful conclusion to the story. They are, at last, bone of bone and flesh of their flesh. They are alike. Now they are human.

A friend once gave me advice about finding a husband, "If he makes you grow into your higher and better self, then he is that one." This is no Disney text, but if it were, at verse 25 the animals would sing an Oscar-winning song and the hippos would start to dance around them. Of course, there is danger surrounding them, and all will soon not go well. But these verses may be best understood if we can capture the wonder of these two beautiful creations, fully alive as part of the circle of life. Let's be clear, too, that the wonder of this text is not limited to Adam and Eve, or even Adam and Steve. This story points us to the deep delight and the astonishing power of human relationships, sexual or otherwise, gendered or non-gendered. We all yearn to live our lives in a community that is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. We long to be fully human.

My friend, who gave me the advice about a husband, forgot to tell me that he would also bring out the very worst. How often we discover that our relationships, which once held so much promise, become broken. Marriage ends in divorce.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1982), 47.

Friendships break. Communities and families are torn apart by division and prejudice. As Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem in Mark, he gives witness to the radical ethic of God's commonwealth. It's important to note that the Pharisees are not exploring marriage as a place of blessing and pain. They are not interested in how the commonwealth of God might give shape to marriages that are breaking. They are only interested in trapping Jesus. They have already set out to destroy him. Since they are not interested in the real reasons for divorce, it's important for us not to take a new rule about divorce from this exchange. It's also not an argument that can be used as a bumper sticker in the culture wars of the twenty-first century to preclude gay marriage. If anything, Jesus is saying, "Of course, human beings were made for relationship, but you're missing the whole point." The problem of marriage and divorce is not settled by an exploration of the rules.

Jesus does engage the question in interesting ways. He grants women the same right as men when it comes to divorce. What strikes me as unique is that he takes seriously the spouse who is left behind. He recognizes that what is new for one is a betrayal for another. He considers the most vulnerable one in this new triad. We may not be able to make a new rule about marriage and re-marriage from this text, but perhaps we can say that in God's commonwealth, the experience of the most vulnerable shapes the choices we make for the future.

Perhaps this deep vulnerability that occurs in the breaking of marriage connects the two parts of this gospel text. Jesus takes into his arms the most vulnerable, the one with no rights, the one least able to shape her future, and suggests that these are examples of God's reign. If we are to draw conclusions about human relationships from these texts, it is the child, or the most vulnerable in our society, that must lead us. If we are to make new rules, the "least" get the first word in what justice looks like. Truly, if we are not able to embrace these little ones, we cannot understand how to be fully human.

At first glance, the Hebrews text seems far from the concrete historical Jesus. This text reads more like liturgy. In many ways, the Markan image of Jesus sitting with the children in his arms is an icon for the Christ in Hebrews. The God who spoke through the prophets, now speaks through this one, who though a little lower than the angels, chooses to sit with the suffering. Perhaps we need Jesus with the children in order for the grand cosmology of Hebrews to ring true. The "reflection of God's glory" is made "perfect in suffering." The writer of Hebrews, in allowing us to see behind the cosmic screen, makes a connection between the wonder of that first creation in the garden and the messy world of children and divorce. The High Priest is the one who welcomes children;

who delights in the wonder of human life; who binds up the broken, in marriages and in all things; who names our names out loud in the presence of the assembly.

Bradley Schmeling



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