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What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse

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Counselors and theologians failing to understand the dynamics of child sexual abuse cases often apply the concept of *law* and *gospel* incorrectly. When this happens, perpetrators are emboldened to offend again and many victims leave the church. To assist spiritual counselors in avoiding this pitfall, I provide an overview of the dynamics present in many cases of sexual abuse and the impact this has on children physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I also discuss the characteristics of many sex offenders and the efforts offenders make to manipulate both the victim and the church. In determining the proper application of law and gospel to victims and offenders, I discuss the law and gospel treatise of C.F.W. Walther. In doing so, I include examples of Walther's application of law and gospel in cases of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Finally, I include practical suggestions for psychotherapists and theologians in applying law and gospel to victims and to perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

"You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you preach the Law to those who are already in terror on account of their sins or the Gospel to those who are living securely in their sins."
—C.F.W. Walther

Members of the clergy, church elders, and lay Christians often struggle with the application of Biblical *law*[1] and *gospel*[2] to victims and perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Partly as a result of ignorance of the dynamics involved in these cases, Christians often apply a heavy dosage of law to victims and gospel to offenders. This misguided, sometimes cruel application of theological principles often drives victims away from the church and emboldens offenders to remain in their sin, if not to offend again.

To assist the church in better responding to instances of child sexual abuse, I present an overview of the typical dynamics present in cases of child sexual abuse from the standpoint of the victim. I also highlight the impact of abuse on children physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In addition, I review cognitive features of child molesters, and the extraordinary steps taken by many offenders to manipulate not only their victims, but also the church as a whole.

In applying law and gospel to victims and offenders, I also present a brief biography of the legendary theologian C.F.W. Walther, whose seminary lectures on law and gospel delivered in 1884–1885 have influenced protestant pastors and church leaders for over a century. More importantly, I analyze one of Walther's central thesis—that the gospel should be pronounced to "crushed" sinners and the law pronounced to "secure

[1]The law is "God's will, which shows people how they should live in order to please God (e.g. the Ten Commandments), condemns their failure to fulfill His will (sin), and threatens God's wrath because of sin. The preaching of the Law is the cause of contrition. Although the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have been abolished (Colossians 2:16–17), the moral law (the Ten Commandments) is in force until the end of time (Mathew 5:18)." (Walther 2010, p. 481).

[2]The Gospel "in its proper and narrow sense, is the glad tidings of forgiveness, peace, life, and joy; the eternal divine counsel of redemption, of which Christ Himself ever was, is, and will be the living center, the very heart and soul. The Gospel (a) imparts the forgiveness of sin; (b) produces true joy and the zeal to do good works; and (c) destroys sin both outwardly and inwardly." (Walther 2010, p. 480).

sinners." I examine Walther's use of this thesis in a case of domestic violence and in another case of sexual exploitation by a clergy. Finally, I also provide practical suggestions for pastors, church leaders, and laity in applying law and gospel to victims of sexual abuse and to perpetrators of sexual abuse. Although I focus on instances of sexual abuse, much of the principles discussed are also pertinent to cases of interpersonal violence and other forms of child maltreatment.

Overview of the Dynamics of Child Sexual Abuse

In order to spiritually counsel or assist sexually abused children in any way, both clergy and laity need to understand the dynamics inherent in cases of familial sexual abuse, as well as many other forms of abuse. Unfortunately, many in the clergy and laity have accepted decades worth of myths about child sexual abuse victims. These myths include the belief that children fantasize about incest and that childrens' allegations of abuse are inherently suspect.

Sigmund Freud and the Historic Skepticism of the Mental Health Field Toward Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

In 1896, about a decade after Walther's law and gospel lectures, Sigmund Freud gave an equally monumental lecture entitled "The Aetiology of Hysteria" in which he discussed 18 male and female patients victimized by sexual abuse as children and the profound impact this had on their mental health. By the close of 1897, however, Freud abandoned his theory partly on the basis that widespread sexual abuse was not probable (Masson 2003). Instead, Freud postulated the theory of infantile sexuality, which evolved into the Oedipus complex theory—the concept that children may fantasize about incestuous relationships and violence (Masson 2003).

Freud's abandonment of the reality of numerous instances of child sexual abuse, and his subsequent assertion that such abuse is rare at best, was instrumental in fueling a dark chapter in the history of psychology. Dr. Anna Salter describes this history with this sober assessment of the field:

> The history of psychology in the past one hundred years has been filled with theories that deny sexual abuse occurs, that discounts the responsibility of the offender, that blame the mother and/or child when it does occur, and that minimize the impact. It constitutes a sorry chapter in the history of psychology, but it is not only shameful, it is also puzzling. Hostility toward child victims and adult women leaks through the literature like poison. (p. 57)

This biased view of allegations of sexual abuse, coupled with high profile day care cases from the 1980's in which many believed children were coached into false allegations (see, for a review, Hechler, 1988), spilled over into our mainstream culture, including religion. For example, one Christian publishing house printed a book whose author claimed there was an "industry" of child protection professionals working to manufacture allegations of abuse and to "snatch" children away from parents (Pride, 1986).

Clergy and laity with such a skeptical view of sexual abuse claims are more likely to view claims of abuse as suspicious, to conclude that the child was equally responsible for any victimization, and to apply a heavy dosage of law to problematic behaviors exhibited by the child—behaviors that, ironically, may be attributable to the abuse (for a review, see Anda & Felitti, 2012).

There is no excuse for modern era clergy applying such a distorted view of law and gospel to child abuse victims. Although all child protection professionals need to be mindful of the possibility of false allegations, a number of studies conclude that false claims of sexual abuse are rare (Oates et al., 2000) and that when children do lie, it is usually done to protect the perpetrator, not to get anyone in trouble (Lawson & Chaffin, 1992). Law enforcement officers and other child protection professionals have made great strides in the past 25 years, improving their skills in interviewing abused children and in collecting evidence—thus further reducing the risk of false allegations (Johnson & Vieth, 2012). Accordingly, it is unreasonable for any pastor to automatically assume that an allegation of abuse, even against a respected member of the church, is untrue.

There is also no excuse for clergy to fail to understand the dynamics inherent in cases of sexual abuse. There is a large and growing body of literature to assist spiritual leaders in understanding these dynamics—including many resources for the faith community (see, for example, Langberg, 1999; 2003; Tracy, 2005).

The Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome (CSAAS)

In 1983, Dr. Roland Summit from UCLA published a pioneering paper which not only challenged decades of myths partly fueled by Freud's theories, but that helped professionals and laypersons understand the dynamics present in child sexual abuse cases that make it difficult for children to disclose abuse timely, if at all. Although not universally accepted, Summit's work has been widely heralded in the mental health field (Lyon, 2002) and accepted by many courts as

helpful in assisting laity understand sexual abuse dynamics (Myers, 1997). Despite its imperfections, CSAAS is a helpful model for theologians or other laypersons to use in understanding the psychological dynamics present in many cases of sexual abuse.

According to Summit (1983), sexual abuse cases are engulfed in secrecy, helplessness, entrapment and accommodation, delayed, conflicting and unconvincing disclosure, and retraction. Clergy and laity who take the time to understand these and other dynamics will increase the chance of responding sensitively to the spiritual needs of maltreated children.

Secrecy

According to Summit (1983), at least three dynamics convey to the victim that the abuse is to remain a secret. First, the circumstances of the abuse suggest the need for secrecy. The abuse may only happen when the victim and perpetrator are alone, it may only happen late at night when the door is locked and the perpetrator is whispering. Second, the secrecy is often a source of fear in which the perpetrator conveys to the child that bad things will happen if there is a disclosure. Bad things may include the abuse of the child's sibling, non-offending parent, or pet. Disclosure may result in the victim's placement in a foster home. Disclosure may result in the child's embarrassment in front of fellow classmates who learn details of the sexual abuse through media or other sources. The child may fear that disclosure will result in his or her condemnation in their church community. Third, secrecy may result in a "promise of safety" and the hope of good things to come. The child may expect that secrecy will keep the family unit intact and may result in special privileges such as staying up later at night, a trip to a favorite vacation destination, or a new toy or other coveted item.

Helplessness

In Summit's (1983) view, child sexual abuse victims typically feel helpless to stop the abuse. First, their size and immaturity create this feeling. A young boy or girl may be less than half the perpetrator's height and weight and is likely less knowledgeable and mature. Second, in our society children are taught to obey those in positions of authority. In church, for example, children are taught to obey their teachers, pastors, and parents and that this obedience is commanded by God (Ex. 20:12). Perpetrators use this dynamic to their advantage as they admonish children to honor requests to submit to sexual conduct with the offender. Third, it is important to keep in mind that most sexual abuse is committed by a trusted, even loved, adult. Accordingly, Summit (1983) contends that many parents or other offenders simply need to suggest that they will no longer love the child if abuse is revealed. In one instance, a child lamented that his grandfather was in prison for sexual abuse and asked the prosecutor "is it OK if I keep grandpa in my heart?"

Entrapment and Accommodation

Since the child has a secret that he or she is helpless to do anything about, Summit (1983) said the child must "accept the situation and survive." Summit claimed that a child may cope with abuse in at least three ways. First, and most commonly, a child will develop what Summit called a "coping mechanism." It may be as simple as a child telling him or herself that the sexual abuse prevents a father from abusing siblings or that the victim is deriving benefits from the abuse in the form of money, gifts, or other privileges. For example, a grand jury investigation of former Penn State University football coach Jerry Sandusky concluded he had given golf clubs, trips, and other expensive gifts to boys he was sexually abusing (Thirty-Third Grand Jury Investigation Report, 2012).

Second, Summit (1983) also suggested that an abused child might dissociate during abusive episodes. To assist theologians in understanding dissociation, think of a time when driving a significant distance and you suddenly realize you have no memory of the drive because your mind was thinking about the sermon that needs writing or any number of other church or family obligations. This is, at some level, a form of dissociation.

When sexually abused, a child may dissociate by subconsciously sending his or her mind to another place or room during abuse. In one case that the author is personally familiar with, for example, a child victim told the investigator she was with Winnie the Pooh in the hundred acre woods during the time her father was anally raping her. Dissociation of this type offers "a kind of temporary emotional escape from the horror, the fear, and that pain" of child abuse (Walker 2008 p. 16).

Third, in extreme cases of trauma, some children may develop what in Summit's day was called a multiple personality disorder but is today referred to as dissociative identity disorder. According to the DSM-IV (APA, 1994), "Dissociative Identity Disorder is the presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states" that "recurrently take control of behavior." Each personality state "may be experienced as if it has a distinct personal history, self-image, and identity, including a separate name." In lay terms, a child abuse victim may sub-consciously develop a second

personality or alter who "suffered the abuse . . . that alter is the one present during the abusive episodes, but is not the one seated at the breakfast table the morning after the attack, chatting away as if nothing happened" (Walker 2008, p. 16).

In movies such as Sybil and Primal Fear, Hollywood has given the general public a sense of dissociative identity disorder that is not always accurate. For example, football legend Herschel Walker endured bullying and cruel racism as a child, which led him to develop a second "Sentry" personality that would protect him whenever he felt threatened. Walker (2008) tells of going to a dentist to have teeth removed when this second, tougher persona took over and led him to refuse novocain or another anesthetic drug to numb the pain. However, Walker says he never changed his name when his "Sentry" personality exhibited itself—he simply developed a different, seemingly invincible persona. Clergy and laity alike should not assume that Christian victims of abuse are immune from dissociative identity disorder. Indeed, Hershel Walker describes himself as a devout Christian "baptized and washed with the blood of Jesus" (Walker, 2008, p. 43).

Theologians should be aware that although there is little doubt that dissociation exists, the medical and mental health fields are not in complete agreement as to the prevalence or even existence of dissociative identity disorder (Raison, 2010). Theologians may not need to understand the many nuances of this debate but should, as a general rule, understand that anyone diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder has likely suffered severe trauma and is in need of continuing, professional mental health support.

If a child cannot figure out a way to cope emotionally, what Summit (1983) calls a *psychic economy*, feelings of rage may cause a child to commit suicide, engage in self-mutilation, become promiscuous, or develop other harmful patterns of behavior. Clergy and laity unaware of these and other dynamics may be quick to dismiss a child's allegations of abuse, concluding the child is exhibiting mental illnesses or is not credible given the closeness with a perpetrator and the many "kindnesses" a child has received from an offender. Similarly, the Christian pastor or lay member may unwittingly focus on delinquent or other behaviors without realizing these behaviors reflect deep-seated childhood trauma.

Delayed and Unconvincing Disclosure

As a result of the dynamics described above, many children never disclose sexual abuse. When children do disclose abuse, Summit (1983) contends the disclosure is often delayed and comes out in an unconvincing manner. Consider, for example, a girl molested for years by her father. Not surprisingly, the child develops an array of mental health problems, truancy and delinquency behaviors, and is sexually promiscuous. At a family reunion, the child asks her father to borrow the keys to a car because she wishes to go on a date. Her father reprimands her, reminding her that the family reunion was planned for more than a year and she needs to stay put. Years of rage fueled by repeated molestations bubble over as the child yells at her dad that when she grows up she will not rape children. A guest overhears this outburst and reports the incident to the church pastor. When confronted, the father tells the pastor the outburst is true but the allegation is not. The father calmly explains the child is out of control and he is simply, as a Christian parent, trying to reign in his troubled daughter. Unless the pastor is aware of child sexual abuse dynamics, he may dismiss the underlying allegations without reporting the case to the authorities or taking any other appropriate action.

Retraction

According to Summit (2003, p. 188), "in the chaotic aftermath of disclosure, the child discovers that the bedrock fears and threats underlying the secrecy are true." In other words, the perpetrator's claim the child would be isolated, not believed, be removed from the home, bullied at school or any number of other horrors do in fact occur. As a result, the child concludes that living with the lie is easier than telling the truth and chooses to recant his or her allegation of sexual abuse. A number of studies of sexual abuse victims have found that recantation is not unusual (Sorenson & Snow, 1991). Again, clergy and laity unfamiliar with these dynamics are not only at risk to accept a recantation at face value, they are often used by perpetrators to apply pressure on children in the hope of securing a recantation. In more than one instance, for example, a non-offending caretaker has taken a child to a pastor to "confess" the lie. Many clergy have testified as character witnesses for an accused perpetrator with little thought as to the impact on the child alleging abuse. In one case that the author prosecuted, a child victim saw both of her ministers and numerous church leaders in the courtroom as a sign of support for the father she accused of molesting her. Upon witnessing this spectacle, the victim asked the prosecutor "Does this mean that God is against me too?"

The ACE Studies: the Medical and Mental Health Risks of Child Abuse

The Adverse Childhood Experience Study is an ongoing collaborative research project between the Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, and Kaiser Permanente in San Diego, California. Over 17,000 patients participating in routine health screening volunteered to participate in the study. According to the ACE researchers, "data resulting from their participation . . . reveals staggering proof of the health, social, and economic risks that result from childhood trauma." (Anda & Felitti, 2012). Specifically, the researchers queried adult patients on ten types of adverse childhood experiences including child sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and witnessing domestic violence. Researchers concluded that patients suffering from one or more adverse childhood experience were statistically more likely to suffer from a variety of medical and mental health problems with the risk of these conditions increasing markedly based on the number and severity of adverse experiences.

Clergy and laity not familiar with the ACE study are at risk to conclude an allegation of sexual abuse is not credible and to focus primarily on the victim's behaviors, including delinquent and criminal behaviors, without fully appreciating the role childhood abuse played in their life. In spiritual terms, the danger is that a pastor will be quick to apply the law, without an appreciation of the need to provide a victim already burdened with enormous guilt the comfort of the gospel.

Spiritual Injuries Resulting from Sexual Abuse

There are a number of studies documenting the impact of abuse on spirituality. For example, in a study of 527 victims of child abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional) it was found that there were significant "spiritual injury" such as feelings of guilt, anger, grief, despair, doubt, fear of death, and belief that God is unfair (Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincellette, & Penk, 1998). However, the same study found that survivors of childhood abuse report praying more frequently and having a "spiritual experience."

When the perpetrator is a member of the clergy, the impact on the victim's spirituality may be even more pronounced. Clergy abusers often use their religion to justify or excuse their sexual abuse of children. According to one study, clergy in treatment for sexually abusing children believed that God would particularly look after the children they had victimized and otherwise keep them from harm (Saradjian & Nobus, 2003). Through their religious role, these offenders also engaged in "compensatory behavior" and believed that their good works in the community would result in God excusing their moral lapses with children. The religious cover used by clergy abusers is often communicated to the victims in a manner that irreparably damages their spirituality. Specifically, church attendance of these survivors decreases, they are less likely to trust God, and their relationship with God often ceases to grow (McLaughlin, 1994).

The Importance of Spirituality for Many Abused Children

Spirituality is of critical importance to most children. Indeed, a "growing body of theoretical and research literature suggests that spiritual development is an intrinsic part of being human" (McLaughlin, 1994, p. 14). Research from UCLA's Higher Education Research institute found that 77% of college freshman believed "we are all spiritual beings" (p.14). Eighty percent of these freshmen said they had an "interest" in spirituality (McLaughlin, 1994). Some studies suggest spirituality may be particularly important to vulnerable children. In a study of 149 youth in an institutional care setting, 86% of these children considered themselves spiritual or somewhat spiritual (McLaughlin, 1994). As an example of the importance spirituality plays for some vulnerable youth, a teenage survivor of the sex industry told a journalist, "I admit that I'm still struggling, even after six months away from the business . . . Because I dropped out of school I have few career options . . . Yet I know what God wants for me. I need to be healed" (Yancey, 2010, p. 73–74).

Gall (2006) found that a victim's "spiritual coping behavior" might play either a positive or negative role in the survivor's ability to cope with the abuse and with life in general. Victims of severe abuse may remain "stuck" in their spiritual development such as remaining angry with God. Children abused at younger ages are "less likely to turn to God and others for spiritual support" (Gall, 2006, p. 838). Nonetheless, even victims describing a difficult relationship with God "still rely on their spirituality for healing." Victims who experience "greater resolution" of their childhood abuse are able to "actively turn to their spirituality to cope . . . rather than attempt to cope on their own" (Gall, 2006, p. 839). When Christian clergy and laity mis-apply law and gospel to victims of abuse, they risk destroying the very coping mechanism many children need to survive physically and emotionally—their sense of spirituality.

Overview of Dynamics of Child Molesters

Child Molesters Vary in Their Typology

It is beyond the expertise of theologians to diagnose or even understand the myriad types of sex offenders or the mindset of those who sexually abuse children (Schlank, 2010). This is important to understand because many pastors and laity assume that

everyone who sexually violates a child does so for the same reason or requires the same degree of supervision, consequences or treatment. For example, there is a difference in the risks posed by a 19-year-old man impregnating his 15-year-old girlfriend and a man accused of molesting multiple boys or girls at a church summer camp. There is also a difference between adult and juvenile sex offenders—with the latter generally more amenable to treatment (Carpenter, Silovsky, & Chaffin, 2006).

In dealing with any particular sex offender, it is important for church leaders to consult with a mental health professional well versed in the literature on sex offenders and who is experienced in dealing with this population. If a parishioner sought spiritual guidance on treating their cancer, diabetes or other ailments, a wise pastor would inquire about the physician's diagnosis and treatment options. A wise pastor would do this because he or she is not a physician. In the same vein, a pastor should not be deciding the risks posed by a given sex offender without consulting a mental health professional who is skilled in the treatment of sex offenders and who, ideally, has assessed and/or treated the offender in question.

Having said this, there are some general characteristics of child molesters that every pastor should know—in part because sex offenders often count on clergy and laity to be ignorant about these characteristics. For starters, clergy and laity should have a working definition of a pedophile. A child molester meeting the DSM-IV criteria of pedophilia (1) is at least 16-years-old, (2) is at least five years older than the child victim, and (3) over a period of at least 6 months has "recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 years or younger)" (APA, 1994).

Although this working definition is helpful, clergy and laity should be cautious in applying the definition without professional guidance. In one instance that the author is personally familiar with, a church assumed the allegations of sexual abuse made by two separate children could not be true because, if they were, the pedophile in question would have had dozens of additional victims in his life. There were two glaring errors made by the church. First, the church leaders failed to recognize that many pedophiles molest hundreds, even thousands, of children without ever getting caught (Abel et al., 1987). Accordingly, it is possible that the alleged offender may have had other victims. Second, and equally important, the offender may not have been a pedophile but could have fit into any number of categories of sex offenders. In commenting on the various reasons offenders molest children, one sex offender treatment provider notes the following:

> There is a subgroup of child molesters who molest children simply because they are sexually attracted to them. There are others who molest because they are antisocial or even psychopathic and simply feel entitled. There are still others who use children for the intimacy they are too timid or impaired to obtain from adults. And there are others who molest children for reasons we don't understand at all. (Salter, 2003, p. 75)

Many child molesters are religious. Although clergy and laity may never be able to master the myriad nuances of sex offenders, they can and should be cognizant of a number of pertinent characteristics of those who offend against children. For starters, the faith community needs to be cognizant that sex offenders are often religious and many of them attend church. In a study of 3,952 male sex offenders, 93% of these perpetrators described themselves as "religious" (Abel & Harlow, 2001).

Religious sex offenders may be the most dangerous group of child molesters. There is some evidence that "religious" sex offenders may be the most dangerous category of offenders. One study found that sex offenders maintaining significant involvement with religious institutions "had more sexual offense convictions, more victims, and younger victims" (Eshuys & Smallbone, 2006; Firestone & Moulden, 2009). According to another study, clergy sex offenders share the same characteristics of non-clergy sex offenders with the exception that clergy are *more likely* to use force (Langevin et al., 2000).

Child molesters manipulate both children *and* the church. Child molesters, particularly those meeting the diagnostic criteria of pedophilia, are extremely manipulative of not only their victims but also the church as a whole. According to Salter (2003, p. 28) "If children can be silenced and the average person is easy to fool, many offenders report that religious people are even easier to fool than most people." In the words of 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 con-

vince, with or without convincing words. (Salter, 2003, p. 29)

Child molesters are skilled at deception because, in part, they have considerable practice at lying to their families, their victims, their friends, and to themselves. Sex offender treatment provider Anna Salter describes the abilities of molesters to lie convincingly in this way:

> Very few of us have ever been suspected of a crime, and fewer still have been interviewed by the police about one. Under such circumstances, detection apprehension would be very high for most of us ... But that would change had we practiced lying over serious matters every day, had we lived a double life, had we been questioned by upset parents or by police numerous times in the past. You are never going to run into a child molester who is not a practiced liar, even if he is not a natural one. (Salter, 2003, p. 203)

Not only are child molesters skilled at lying to pastors and parishioners alike, they are often proud of their abilities to fool the leaders and members of their congregations. In the words of one convicted child molester:

> (T)here was a great amount of pride. Well, I pulled this one off again. You're a good one ... There were times when little old ladies would pat me on the back and say, 'You're one of the best young men that I have ever known.' I would think back and think 'If you really knew me, you wouldn't think that.' (Salter, 2003, p.199)

Many child molesters offend with others present. In many instances, a child molester offends with other children or even another adult present. According to one study, 54.9% of child molesters offended when another child was present and 23.9% offended when another was adult present (Underwood, Patch, Cappelletty, & Wolfe, 1999). The abuse, of course, may be subtle and not easily detected. For example, a child molester in a Christian school may call a pupil up to his desk ostensibly to review an examination while, at the same time, touches the child's genitals which are covered from the other students by the desk. As another example, a father may touch a child beneath the bed covers while his wife is asleep in the same bed. Offenders report that molesting a child with others present may be more arousing and may also give them more power over the child—conveying to the victim that he or she can be abused at any time, in any place, with anyone present. The fact that many sex offenders molest victims with others present is critical for clergy and laity to understand. Without this recognition, offenders often argue that a child's allegations are absurd—after all, who would sexually touch a child with others in the room? A pastor acquainted with studies such as those cited in this article will tell a suspect that, as it turns out, many sex offenders engage in precisely this conduct.

Many child molesters carefully select their victims. Many child molesters put a great deal of time and thought into selecting the children they will violate. There are two reasons for this. First, sex offenders often look for the easiest target. Second, sex offenders often look for the child or children least likely to be believed should he or she disclose the abuse. A Christian convicted of sexually abusing children at church was asked how he selected his victims. The offender icily responded:

> First of all you start the grooming process from day one ... the children that you're interested in ... You find a child you might be attracted to ... For me, it might be nobody fat. It had to be a you know, a nice looking child ... You maybe look at a kid that doesn't have a father image at home, or a father that cares about them ... if you've got a group of 25 kids, you might find 9 that are appealing ... then you start looking at their family backgrounds. You find out all you can ... which ones are the most accessible ... you get it down to one that is the easiest target, and that's the one you do. (Salter, 2003, p. 57)

This is a critical dynamic for clergy and laity to be aware of (Vieth, 2011). When sex offenders are suspected of abuse, they often point to the accuser and remind the congregation of the child's history of problems—ignoring the fact that it was precisely these problems that made the child such an easy target. Simply stated, child molesters often select damaged children or, in the alternative, they damage the children in their homes and then cite the damage as proof the victim cannot be believed. It is a wicked game in which the church and the children often lose.

Child molesters often abuse children in the name of God. Child molesters often use religious or spiritual themes in the abuse of children. Child molesters may cite a child's biological reaction to abuse and contend the victim equally enjoyed the abuse and is equally sinful. It is not uncommon for a molester to pray with his victim and ask God's forgiveness for both. A molester may tell a victim that if he or she disclosed the abuse,

the church will condemn the victim for his of her sin. In one case that the author is personally familiar with from his experience as a prosecuting attorney, a child eventually learned to initiate sexual activity with her father simply as a means of getting the abuse over with. The perpetrator, however, reminded the victim of the initiation and convinced her she was the offender. The victim developed a series of medical and mental health conditions including attempted suicide.

In a highly publicized case, Father Lawrence Murphy sexually abused as many as 200 deaf or hard of hearing boys and often used spiritual language or religious concepts in the abuse. For example, he told one victim that, "God wanted him to teach the boy about sex but that he had to keep it quiet because it was under the sacrament of confession" (for a review, see Goodstein, 2010).

According to one sex offender treatment provider, sexual abuse in the name of God creates a "triple trauma" involving the abuse itself, the betrayal of trust, and spiritual harm that often includes "threats regarding God and damnation" (Pendergast, 2004). According to Pendergast:

> Fear of retribution from God, whom the abusers related 'gave me permission to do this to you,' and 'if you tell anyone, God will punish you in hell for eternity,' produces an intense fear as well as feeling of confusion. The confusion results from the fact their religion teaches them that what they are doing is wrong and sinful, but the religious abusers teach them that the God of their religion gave them permission to sexually abuse them. (p. 285)

In one case that I handled as a prosecutor, a teenage victim of a neighborhood child molester told me, when I was preparing her for court case, that she had not disclosed the abuse for years because she was certain her church would reprimand her for the sin and not the offender. The child had internalized many of the messages provided by the perpetrator and saw no difference between sinning and being the victim of sin.

What would Walther Do?

C.F.W. Walther: A Brief History

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born in Germany on October 25, 1811. His great grandfather, grandfather, and father were pastors and Walther continued this family tradition. Although little is known of Walther's mother, there is some indication his father was physically abusive. In reference to his father, Walther said "A young man must endure much pain, ere he becomes a gentleman" (Walther, 2010, p. 100). As one example of this strictness, there was a special sofa in the family parlor reserved only for guests. When the boy Walther forgot this rule and sat on the sofa he was physically punished (Suelflow, 2000). This harshness may have particularly impacted the sensitive Walther who, according to one scholar, lacked self-confidence and saw himself as a "miserable boy" (Barnbrock, Espinosa, Holtan, Schaum, & Egger, 2011). Although there is little, if any, indication that Walther ever considered himself a victim of child abuse—the harsh discipline of children was more commonly accepted in his era than in ours[3]—it is possible that, under current law, Walther's childhood would be deemed abusive (Vieth, 1994).

Although it is difficult, probably impossible, to accurately assess how physical blows received as a boy may have impacted Walther, it is interesting to note that he developed some of the characteristics of children enduring maltreatment—including bouts of depression. Indeed, Walther suffered at least three nervous breakdowns at different points in his life and, at the height of his career, wished that he were dead (Harrison, 2011).[4] Although there may have been a biological component to Walther's mental illness and any or all of the myriad heartaches in his life may have contributed to his depression, the impact of violence during his childhood should not be excluded as a possible contributing factor (Barnbrock et al., 2011). Whether or not the violence he experienced influenced his empathy toward victims, there is evidence that, on more than one occasion, Walther displayed a remarkable sensitivity to the victims of physical and sexual exploitation.

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[3]Even among conservative Christians, corporal punishment is viewed much more skeptically in the modern era with a number of theologians challenging the belief that the Bible requires physical discipline (Webb 2011).

[4]In 1860, at the height of his productivity, Walther wrote: "I may and must now reveal to you that the last half of the previous year has been one of the most difficult times of my life. I was physically incapable of attending to even half the office that I am dignified to carry out among you in unworthy fashion. Even more, the prospect that I would again be capable of the same became gloomier and darker month by month. I owe it to you to be transparent . . . My own relationship with my God and Lord filled me with deep aversion and vexation. God placed before me, as never before, my entire past. He let me see my misery as I had never seen it before. I was filled with misery and distress . . . My only hope was a blessed death." (Harrison 2011, p. 24)

Walther was part of a group of Saxons who migrated to Missouri in search of religious freedom. The group was led by Martin Stephan, a charismatic leader who became increasingly isolated from his followers. Stephan assumed dictatorial powers and insisted the Saxons build roads and bridges prior to planting crops or homes. There were also allegations of financial mismanagement and, most seriously, the sexual exploitation of a number of women. Additional details of these events, and Walther's response, are discussed below.

Walther eventually became the leader of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, serving as its first president. Under Walther's leadership, the synod grew from 30 congregations to 678, and from less than 5,000 baptized members to nearly 450,000. He oversaw the development of schools, seminaries, and publications (for a review, see Walther, 2011). His most noteworthy achievement, however, was a series of Friday evening seminary lectures on the application of law and gospel—lectures that have profoundly influenced Christianity for more than a century.

Walther's Treatise on Law and Gospel

In distinguishing between law and gospel, Martin Luther described the terms this way:

> (T)he gospel is the message about the incarnate Son of God, who was given us without our merits for salvation and peace. It is the word of salvation, the Word of grace, the Word of comfort, the Word of joy . . . But the Law is the Word of perdition, the Word of wrath, the Word of sadness, the Word of pain, the voice of the Judge and the accused, the Word of unrest, the Word of malediction. (Plass, 1959, p. 732)

Although Luther's description of law and gospel are clear, the great reformer acknowledged the complexity of applying these concepts as a theologian to individual cases. Indeed, Luther said that anyone who could accurately and consistently apply these concepts was worthy of the title "Doctor of Holy Scripture" (Kinnaman & Lane, 2010, p. 129)

Perhaps more than any other theologian, C.F.W. Walther applied himself to understanding the application of law and gospel. According to a noted historian of American religion:

> Walther's influence was especially significant in that he stood almost alone in the nineteenth-century American theological scene as one fully aware of the crucial importance of the problems of Law and Gospel. (Suelflow, 2000, p.11)

Walther's lectures on the law and gospel extend several hundred pages and continue to be utilized by Christian theologians of diverse denominations (Pless, 2005). Walther found at least twenty-one ways in which Christians confuse and otherwise fail to properly apply law and gospel (Kinnaman, 2010). Walther's law and gospel thesis most applicable to instances of child sexual abuse is thesis VIII. According to this thesis, "(y)ou are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you preach the Law to those who are already in terror on account of their sins or the Gospel to those who are living securely in their sins" (Walther, 2010, p. 113).

Walther's Application of Law and Gospel in Cases of Sexual or Domestic Abuse

The case of a woman fleeing an abusive husband. According to Suelflow (2000), while still serving as a pastor in Germany, Walther provided spiritual counseling to a woman whose husband physically abused her. On one occasion, the woman was beaten so severely that she was unconscious. Walther intervened on behalf of the woman's safety, going so far as to draft a petition for separation. Although Walther was reprimanded and fined for his intervention, he wrote a letter defending his conduct and his theology. It may even be that Walther lied to the authorities as a means of protecting the woman—claiming she was not interested in emigration to America when in fact both the woman and her son appeared on the immigrant list.

Perhaps the blows Walther received from his father made him particularly empathetic to others "disciplined" with violence. Whether or not this is true, Walther understood that a husband pledged to love his wife as Christ loved the church would not beat her (Eph. 5:34). In a wedding sermon on the obligations of a husband to love his wife, Walther said:

> (T)he Christian husband should love his wife in deed, care for her body and soul, pray for her and with her, not let her lack any good thing, *be her protector,* comfort her in moments of sadness, and as his other self, daily seek to provide her joy. (Walther, 1978, p. 176, emphasis added)

Obviously, a man who is physically striking his wife is failing his Christian obligation to protect her and to fill her life with joy. Long before a societal recognition of domestic violence, Walther understood this fundamental principle of a Christian marriage.

The case of Martin Stephan. Suelflow (2000) also details that, upon their arrival in Missouri, the Saxon

immigrants divided themselves into two groups with Walther among the pastors and parishioners remaining in St. Louis and the rest going to Perry County under the leadership of Martin Stephan. On the voyage to America, Stephan became increasingly isolated from his flock and prepared documents declaring himself Bishop and assuming significant powers over his flock. In Perry County, Stephan ordered the Saxons to build roads and bridges instead of planting crops or constructing dwellings. He ordered the pastors and parishioners in St. Louis not to visit Perry County without his explicit permission.

On May 5, 1839, one of the pastors remaining in St. Louis, Friedeman Loeber, delivered a "soul-searching" sermon. Although the contents of the sermon no longer exist, Loeber's words contributed to two women visiting him separately and confessing to sexual relations with Martin Stephan. In the days that followed, two additional women also made detailed confessions.

Loeber confided in his fellow St. Louis clergy who selected Walther to travel to Perry County to address the situation. One factor in selecting Walther appears to be that he was the pastor who had "expressed greater opposition to Stephan" (Suelflow, 2000, p. 50–52).

Walther arrived unannounced and in direct contradiction to Stephan's edicts. When Walther arrived, Stephan and others were gathered around a campfire and there was an immediate confrontation with Stephan who, according to one scholar, expressed "total disapproval" of Walther's presence (Suelflow 2000, p. 50–52). The next day, Walther met alone with Stephan. Although he did not apparently discuss the allegations of sexual exploitation, there is no doubt that Walther was openly defying Stephan and otherwise making it clear his belief that Stephan's conduct was sinful. Walther then proceeded to undermine Stephan's authority by preaching publicly, by encouraging parishioners to plant crops and build houses as opposed to roads and bridges, and to otherwise deliberately "give the impression . . . that something was very wrong" (Suelflow, 2000, p. 51). Within a few weeks, most of the St. Louis Saxons also arrived, formed a church council and invited Stephan to meet with them. When Stephan refused, calling the council a "rebellious faction," the council excommunicated Stephan on the basis of teaching false doctrine, financial mismanagement, and sexual immorality. Stephan was given the option of a church trial, returning to Saxony, or exile across the river to Illinois. Stephan chose the latter and never returned to his parishioners.

Some modern day theologians and scholars challenge Walther's handling of the Stephan matter, alleging Walther violated the principle in the gospel of Matthew to first privately confront a sinner (Manteufal, 2011). One theologian calls Walther's application of the principles in Matthew "dubious" and fraught with "serious errors" (Manteufal, 2011). I contend that this analysis is flawed on at least three grounds. First, Stephan's misconduct involved more than just sexual relations with multiple women, it involved dictatorial demands on *all* of the Saxon pastors and parishioners including a prohibition from setting foot in the colony without permission. Accordingly, Walther fulfilled his obligations in Matthew simply by showing up—his mere presence informed Stephan that Walther regarded his edicts and conduct as sinful.

Second, Walther did meet privately with Stephan before advising the immigrants in Perry County to violate Stephan's commands. Although Walther did not apparently speak about the allegations of sexual exploitation, it is a fair inference that Walther received a clear indication of Stephan's unrepentant state. Indeed, shortly after his meeting with Stephan, Walther delivered a sermon based on the text of John 3:20: "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (Concordia Seminary, 2011). This text and accompanying sermon suggest Walther had concluded that Stephan had hardened his heart and was far from the broken sinner for which the gospel is intended.

Third, an explicit confrontation with Stephan about the sexual exploitation allegations may have endangered the lives of others. Given that Stephan had left his wife in Germany, that multiple women had accused him of sexual offenses, and that he had created a situation in Perry County where he was seemingly immune from oversight raised a strong possibility of additional victims. Too strong of a confrontation with Stephan may have caused him to pressure other women *not* to disclose additional offenses. Moreover, Stephan's control of the treasury and the sway he had over the immigrants, a sway that was endangering their lives because crops were not planted, required extreme caution.

If a member of a congregation were observed by a fellow believer to be holding up a convenience store with a gun, it would be ludicrous to suggest our Christian obligation is to speak with the man before calling the police or taking other meaningful action to protect the victim of this crime (Schuetze, personal communication). Applying Mathew 18 in such a rigid, thoughtless manner would endanger lives should the criminal choose to fire the weapon to avoid capture. In cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, there is also a grave dan-

ger in rigidly adhering to Mathew 18 in that doing so may result in an offender destroying evidence, pressuring victims to remain silent or recant, or even the possibility an offender may harm himself.

The seriousness of Stephan's conduct cannot be overstated. Given his absolute power over the flock, and the vulnerability of the Saxons in a new country and culture, the potential for continued abuse was extremely high. In many states today, it is a felony crime for a pastor to have sex with a parishioner that he or she is providing spiritual counseling to, even if the parishioner consents (Minnesota Statutory Section, 609.344, subd. 1(k)(l)(ii) 2012). As noted by one historian, the women Stephan sexually exploited were both "impressionable and vulnerable." (Concordia Seminary, 2011). Although Walther may not have had our modern era appreciation of the significant differences in power between a pastor and the parishioner he is counseling, Stephan's conduct was so extreme it is difficult to believe Walther did not understand the egregiousness of the conduct.

Walther's handling of the Stephan situation is akin to the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians in which he urged that a man involved in an incestuous relationship be expelled from the congregation (1 Cor. 5: 1–13, ESV). Paul did not ask the congregation to meet privately with the man before excommunication or wait until Paul could visit and examine the man. Instead, Paul wrote "For though absent in body . . . I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing . . . You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved" (1 Cor. 5:3–5).

It is interesting to note that Paul does not urge the excommunication of the woman involved in this incest—perhaps an implicit understanding of her vulnerability. Similarly, Walther and the other Saxon pastors appear to have recognized the particular vulnerability of the women Stephan exploited and simply pronounced forgiveness and the full force of the gospel. The law was reserved for the unrepentant perpetrator.

Applying Law and Gospel to Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

In a great many of his published prayers and addresses, C.F.W. Walther recognized that Christians are charged with grave responsibilities for the care of children and that God will hold us accountable for our unfaithfulness in discharging this duty (Walther, 2011). Walther called children "far more precious than gold or silver, than house and home" and said that God would one day ask us "Where are the children I have given you? Have any of them been lost?" (Walther, 2011, p. 136).

Reflecting his belief that God was especially concerned with the welfare of children, Walther prayed "Lord Jesus, by Your holy Word You have again warned us against despising any one of these little ones, for their angels always behold the face of Your Father in heaven." In the care of children, Walther admonished his parishioners to "leave no stone unturned to keep them safe from the evil foe and the world . . ." (Walther, 2011, p. 133).

Given his childhood history and his pastoral history in applying the law and gospel in cases of violence and sexual exploitation, it is more than conjecture to suggest that if Walther were alive today he would take heed of the many studies documenting the devastation that abuse has on a child's spirituality. Accordingly, pastors wishing to follow the spirit of Walther in applying law and gospel to victims of child abuse may begin by reviewing the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Studies and remind themselves of the shattered lives left from child abuse. With these studies in mind, a pastor contemplating the words of our Savior will likely find a clear course of action—the liberal use of the gospel, and the sparing use of the law. To this end, the following guidelines may be of assistance.

Avoid the Temptation to Focus on the Victim's Sins

If the ACE studies are accurate, a pastor or other Christian meeting with a boy or girl, man or woman, abused as a child may very well see the aftermath of this exploitation—a child or adult who has turned to alcohol, drugs, smoking, sex, food, etc. in search of solace. The victim may have anger problems, multiple divorces, a criminal history, drug or alcohol problems, or mental illness. Consequently, the victim may be the subject of church gossip as elders and other modern day Pharisees whisper her shame and promote their own righteousness. When confronted with such a pilgrim, a pastor may be tempted to focus his or her gaze on the specks in the victim's eye, and avert attention away from the gaping hole in the victim's heart—a hole that can only be filled by the gospel. A pastor who judges quickly and harshly may lose the child forever—and will one day be a subject to the gaze of a Savior who asks us to care for the suffering.

Instead, the pastor should recognize the brokenness before him—a brokenness that may have displayed itself for years. Jesus came to bind the wounds of the broken hearted and the gospel may be the only tonic the abused child has *never* experienced. The pastor must pour out this oil liberally.

Assure the Victim of Christ's Empathy

A victim may question the goodness of God, in part, because of the theological statements made by the offender. The victim may also question whether or not God can truly understand his or her pain or experiences. When this is the case, a Christian pastor can assist by showing the child a very different image of God. Tell the victim that those who abused him or her violated the clear commandments of God and that any twisted theology they employed in justification came not from God, but from Satan himself. Tell them that Jesus understands such toxic theology—after all, the devil employed that trickery on Christ as well (see, for example, Mt. 4: 1–11). More importantly, speak of Christ's love of children and the grave warnings he gave to anyone who harms them—telling his disciples that the angels of children have direct access to his Father and that being tossed into a sea with a millstone around their neck would be a better choice than to hurt a child (Mt. 18:6). Tell them that Christ, the very Son of God, was a descendant of a sexually exploited woman (Joshua 2, 6:22–25; Heb 11:31; Mt 1:5), and was frequently seen in the company of other sexually exploited women as he promised not only his help, but the very kingdom of God (Mt. 21:31).

Tell the suffering soul that Jesus understands maltreatment. As one who was called names and mocked with purple robes and twisted thorns, Christ understands emotional abuse. As the recipient of blows to his face and whips to his back, Christ understands physical abuse. As one nailed naked to a tree, publicly exposed to the jeers of soldiers, Christ even understands the pain of children forced to disrobe before the eyes of men with only evil thoughts. Surely he has borne our sorrows.

Apply the Gospel Compassionately

The victim may have extreme guilt over the usage of drugs or alcohol, may have suffered from myriad failed relationships or a host of other problems. The pastor should recognize the enormity of this pain and assure the survivor of God's forgiveness and love. Simply stated, the pastor must display the compassion of our Savior.

Tony Campolo tells of being at a diner early one morning and overhearing Agnes, a prostitute, lament that she was about to turn 39 years old and had never had a birthday party. Campolo worked with the manager of the diner to arrange for a splendid party for Agnes, complete with a birthday cake. Upon seeing the cake, Agnes was overcome with this strange love. She asked if she could take the cake to show her mother. As Agnes left momentarily with the cake, Campolo led all the prostitutes gathered for the party in prayer for Agnes (see Campolo, 2009, for a complete account). In other words, Campolo preached the gospel by demonstrating the compassion of Christ.

Assist the Victim in Accessing Appropriate Medical and Mental Health Care

Pastors should not ignore the needs of those struggling with drugs, alcohol, sexual impulses, anger, or any number of other conditions often found among those ripped from childhood. In helping the child access mental health services, pastors should seek a mental health provider current on the literature addressing childhood trauma and who is skilled at providing counseling or other services. Many well-educated professionals have had very little training at the undergraduate and graduate level on child sexual abuse (Champion, Shipman, Bonner, Hensley, & Howe, 2003), and thus it is critical to ask some questions before making a referral. In some cases, an incompetent counselor may be worse than no counselor at all.

Refrain from Platitudes

Many well-meaning theologians are quick to offer a biblical platitude to complex spiritual struggles. When this happens, a victim often feels frustrated and looks elsewhere for guidance (Brown, 2009). Consider, for example, the complex theological questions contained in this survivor's account of trauma, shared with the author:

> When I was a little girl, my dad would come into my bedroom to tuck me in. He would read me a story and then he would have me utter my bedtime prayers. 'Now I lay me down to sleep . . .' After the prayers, Dad would sexually abuse me. When the abuse was done he would tell me things like 'God doesn't hear your prayers. If he did, he wouldn't allow me to touch you sexually right after your prayers. Either there is no God or, if God exists, he is unable to protect you.' I have never forgotten what my dad said. I'm a grown woman now and, every time I pray, I remember all the times I asked God to watch over me during the night, and how the prayers went unanswered. I want to pray, I want to be close to God, but I don't know how. I'm thinking maybe my dad was right—either there is no God or else he is unable to protect me. Please tell me what to do.

A pastor engaged with this parishioner will need to explore the toxic theology presented by her father as well as the difficult questions posed about prayer. Simply

stated, a platitude won't due. What is likely needed is a series of theological discussions on these myriad issues. The pastor may wish to recommend helpful books or materials on one or more of these issues and discuss the assignments with the parishioner (see, for example, Yancey, 2010 for a helpful book that includes myriad references to the unanswered prayers of child abuse victims). The pastor must be invested for the long haul.

Don't Make Forgiveness Into a Law, But a Change of Heart Rooted in the Gospel

Many victims of abuse struggle with the issue of forgiveness and, when forgiveness does occur, it often takes time (Worthington et al., 2000). Consider, for example, the pain of this victim, shared with the author:

> I am a police officer and a Christian. I've been baptized, confirmed, and have faithfully attended church all my life. I am, though, deeply troubled. When I was a boy, my father cruelly abused me. One of his favorite things to do was to take me into the barn (we lived on a farm), strip me naked, bind my hands together with a rope and then toss the other end of the same rope over the rafters in the barn so that I would hang naked in the barn as he beat me with a stick. The sound of that stick, the smell of that barn, and the sight of my blood are never far from my memory. I am a good person, and I believe Jesus is my savior. At the same time, though, I know I'm going to hell. I recall the Sunday School lesson of Jesus scolding Peter that our obligation is not to forgive seven times but seventy times seven—meaning an infinite number of times. I recall Jesus saying that if we can't forgive others, we won't be forgiven. Try as I might, I cannot forgive my father. Why should I have to go to hell because I can't forgive the man who tortured me?

Although some of the answers to this question may differ depending on the particular denomination of the survivor, it is clear that the survivor has multiple theological questions, which need careful consideration and compassionate responses (Tracy, 2005). As a starting point, though, three concepts may be helpful. First, assure the survivor that forgiveness is not a toleration of sin. The child abuse victim has every right to have a perpetrator prosecuted and otherwise held accountable for crimes committed. If forgiveness was the toleration of sin, no government could enforce the law, no parent could correct a child, and no church could exercise discipline.

Second, recognize that forgiveness cannot be forced. Requiring the victim to forgive a perpetrator as a condition of redemption is simply to place the victim under the law. Instead, suggest to the victim that forgiveness is a gift of God that allows the survivor to let go overwhelming feelings of anxiety, hatred, and anger. Many victims have told me over the years that until they forgave an offender, the perpetrator continued to have power over them. Martin Moran, a survivor of child sexual abuse at the hands of "Bob," a man at a church summer camp, described the process of forgiveness with these words (Moran, 2005, p. 279):

> And a thought came to me. Something Sister Christine said all those years ago. That with the really tough things it would always come down to grace. *A gift from the beyond that moves us toward our own salvation.* And as I crawled out into the thick Los Angeles traffic, what I kept hearing in my head was this prayer, a plea repeating: *OK, grace, please, let it go, let him be, for heaven's sake. Let him rest.* I mean Bob, of course. But then, I realize I'm really talking about someone else. The twelve-year-old. The sweet kid caught in a photo, still talking his way out. And I'm not sure how in the world to let him rest. Not yet, anyway.

Third, point the victim to the cross and trust the Holy Spirit to do His work. Diane Langberg, a Christian psychologist specializing in counseling sexually abused children, puts it this way:

> It has been my experience in my work with survivors that rather than simply telling them they need to forgive—a statement that often overwhelms them with despair—it is much more helpful to teach them, as they are ready, about the work of God in Christ on the cross . . . Over time, clients see evidence of that work in their own lives . . . The recognition of that wonderful redemption almost always results in a hunger to be like the one who has loved them so faithfully. (Langberg, 2003, p. 185)

Cautiously Respond When a Victim Asks to Confront the Perpetrator

Martin Moran chose to confront the man who molested him at a church camp only to find that the offender continued to engage in cognitive distortions that minimized his conduct. Specifically, the perpetrator told Moran:

> I wanted to help you. You were such a gentle soul . . . Mentally, you were way ahead of the other boys. You were special . . . There were others, I admit. But not like you. You were so curious about things . . . you were shy and I wanted to teach you about the land and animals and help you gain confidence. And you did. (Moran, 2005, p. 274).

Rather than genuine repentance, the offender continued to minimize his own conduct and suggest to Moran that somehow the sexual abuse was *good* for him. This is not an isolated or unusual occurrence and pastors need to help survivors understand that a confrontation with the offender is unlikely to go as they envision. If they nonetheless choose to confront the offender, the survivor should be fully prepared by a mental health professional to process the event before and after the confrontation. It may also be wise for a pastor, counselor, or other support person to be with the victim during any confrontation so that the support person can immediately challenge the cognitive distortions the offender may direct at the survivor (Langberg, 2003).

Seek the Lost

Preaching the gospel to abused children involves more than waiting for one to appear in our office or even our churches—it means an active search for the lost. Given how many of these children are driven from the church by Christians who violated their bodies in the name of God and by other Christians who, at best, responded passively, there is an urgent need for Christendom to adorn itself in sackcloth and ashes and then change course. Pastors should be proactive in preaching about the sin of child abuse, Christian publishing houses should produce books and other materials directed at abused children or those who seek to help them, and every Christian should promote and enforce rigorous child protection policies as a public witness that the church cares for children in deed and not just in word (Vieth, 2011). This is not an easy course to take and many will bristle at a bold ministry to abused children, particularly if this means bringing such damaged souls into our midst. If, though, the church cannot heed Christ's command to care for children, those closest to God in faith (Mt. 18: 3, Lk 10:21) and yet the most vulnerable, it is doubtful a church can consider itself truly Christian. In addressing the needs of abused children, the church has done too little for too long and, when it has acted, has often done so for the wrong reason—such as avoiding a lawsuit (Lytton, 2008). Instead, the church needs to act out of genuine repentance and an overflowing of Christian love. Let that reformation begin with each of us.

Applying Law and Gospel to Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse

Throughout his lectures on law and gospel, as well as his addresses and prayers, Walther was deeply concerned about applying the gospel to "secure sinners." Walther claimed that a Christian church does not "tolerate obvious servants of sin" (Walther, 2011, p. 155). In his lectures on law and gospel, Walther told his seminary students: "Do not proclaim forgiveness of sins to impenitent and secure sinners. That would be a horrible mingling of Law and Gospel. It would be like stuffing food into the mouth of a person who is already filled to the point of vomiting . . ." (Walther, 2011, p. 45).

Avoid Cheap Grace

Walther's words reflect the concept of "cheap Grace"—a term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran minister executed by the Nazis because of his opposition to the government (for a review, see Metaxas, 2010). Bonhoeffer defined cheap grace as "grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices" (Bonhoeffer, 1959, p. 43). Many sex offenders have found the value of "cheap grace" in faith communities. Simply put, these sex offenders have come to realize that if they cry readily and mouth the words of repentance they won't have to take any action to remedy the damage they have inflicted. Numerous clergy have been confronted with offenders who confess to sexually abusing children, emotionally express remorse, and pledge that abuse will never happen again. Many offenders beg for God's forgiveness and some clergy members are quick to absolve sinners while simultaneously ignoring the needs of victims. When this happens, many offenders return home, realize how easy it is to be forgiven and will molest children again.

Ask Tough Questions

Given the manipulative nature of many offenders, members of the clergy may wish to ask a series of questions to determine the seriousness of the offender's repentance. Pastors faced with offenders may wish to ask the following:

- Have you informed your spouse that you have sexually abused your child? If your wife wants you to move out of the house, are you willing to do it? If the child victim wants you to leave the house are you willing to do it?
- Have you informed your child's medical provider that you have violated his or her body?
- Have you referred your child to a counselor to assist in coping with the abuse you have inflicted on him or her?
- Do you hold yourself fully responsible for your

conduct—or do you believe your victim in some way contributed to the abuse?

- Have you turned yourself in to the police? Are you willing to confess your crimes to the police or will you make them "prove it"? If the government files charges for crimes you have committed, will you be pleading guilty or will you force your child victim to testify publicly and be grilled by any attorney you hire?
- Are you willing to enroll in a sex offender treatment program?

An offender who is confessing sexual misconduct but is unwilling to address the physical or emotional needs of his victim, to disclose the abuse to his spouse, or to seek sex offender treatment, may be seeking forgiveness but is giving no indication of an intention to repair the damage inflicted or to reform his behavior. Given the serious criminal nature of the conduct, an offender unwilling to turn him or herself into the police should be subjected to church discipline—not the recipient of sacraments (Metaxas, 2010).

Apply the Law as an Act of Genuine Love

Some members of the clergy have suggested to me that such harsh treatment of an offender removes the gospel from their work. Pastors with this concern should contemplate how they would handle a situation in which a parishioner confesses to having committed numerous thefts, asks God's forgiveness for his crimes, but freely admits he has no intention of returning any of the stolen property to his victims, much less turning himself into the police. When confronted with this hypothetical, many pastors acknowledge they would not pronounce forgiveness since it is clear the offender is not truly penitent. This is the universal response that I have received when presenting this hypothetical scenario to clergy attending lectures. The very same principle must be applied to sex offenders unwilling to hold themselves accountable to the authorities or to do everything within their means to assist the children they have harmed.

Such a harsh application of the law is not cruel, but a genuine act of love. A sex offender unwilling to accept full responsibility for his conduct, who continues to minimize his offense or to blame others for his conduct is not yet the "crushed" sinner Walther believed to be ready for the gospel. Specifically, Walther said:

> Woe to everyone who pampers secure sinners with soft pillows and cushions! These preachers lull to sleep with the Gospel those who ought to be awakened from their sleep with the law. It is a wrong application of the Gospel to preach it to people who are not afraid of sinning. (Walther, 2010, p. 39)

Just as Walther believed God will hold us accountable for failing to care for children, it is also true God will hold us accountable for failing to properly apply the law to those sex offenders secure in their sins. Pastors offering cheap grace provide a false solace and serve only to endanger the soul.

Seek True Confession

Like Walther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognized the need for true confession, fearing that many parishioners avoid discussing their sins with a fellow Christian in the secret hope of continuing their conduct. Bonhoeffer believed these Christians recognize that a brother in the faith may hold them accountable for their sins and demand a change in their behavior (Bonhoeffer, 1954). Fearing the necessary dosage of the law, these sinners unwittingly also deprive themselves of the gospel.

Recognize the Value of Earthly Consequences

When a pastor provides a healthy dose of the law, the child molester is forced to realize how much damage he has done and the consequences of his actions. The sex offender may lose his freedom and his family, may have significant restrictions on where he can work and live, and may forever be ostracized by society. It is only in this brokenness, though, that an offender will find the true power of the gospel. For many sex offenders, the only way to the cross is to lose everything.

Consider, for example, the two thieves crucified with Jesus. Although both thieves recognized their crimes, one of the men was not repentant, choosing instead to mock Christ and demanding that Jesus take this criminal from the cross (Lk 23:39). The other thief, though, did not ask to be excused from earthly consequences for his sins, acknowledging, "(w)e are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve" (Lk. 23:41). This repentant sinner simply threw himself upon the mercy of his Lord. In response, he received the gospel: "I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23: 42–43).

When confronted by sex offenders complaining of prison sentences and registration requirements, clergy and laity may wish to remind them of the thief who accepted governmental punishments for his crimes and asked only for the mercy of God. It was this genuine repentance, a repentance that did not seek relief from

earthly consequences to sin, that Jesus responded to with unmerited grace.

Conclusion

Jesus called on us to display the humility and faith of "little children" if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18: 2–3). Jesus also warned us not to cause these children to sin and said that, "whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me" (Mt. 18: 5–6). Unfortunately, many who sexually abuse children do so in the name of Christ and purposely twist theology in such a way as to convince the child he or she is responsible for the abuse. As a result, many of these children suffer significant medical, mental health, and spiritual damage. Abused children are at greater risk to develop problems with drugs, alcohol, smoking, anger, and a host of other ills.

Clergy and laity unfamiliar with these dynamics often apply the law to victims and the gospel to perpetrators of abuse. When this happens, perpetrators are emboldened to strike again, and many children are lost to the church. With a large and growing body of research documenting these facts, the church can no longer hide behind ignorance. Simply stated, the church must properly apply law and gospel to victims and offenders and to otherwise fully prepare for the day of judgment when our Lord will ask each of us, "Where are the children?"

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