

Sex Abuse among Evangelicals worse than for Catholics

By Nick Gier

Protestants are going to have to accept the fact that we have many similarities with our Catholic brothers and sisters when it comes to how we have failed to protect God's children.
—Boz Tchividjian, law professor at evangelical Liberty University

He said that under every sin is another sin; that there is a sin in your life that caused your rape
—rape victim Katie Landry, reporting her college counselor's diagnosis

She suffered from "lust in its most base form, uncontrolled in the body of a spiritually immature woman."
—biblical diagnosis of 13-year-old victim Kim James

That Doug Wilson, who knowingly married a young woman to a convicted pedophile, is proudly trashing his critics, and refusing to admit error in any respect, is deeply discouraging, to put it in the mildest possible terms.
—Rod Dreher, *The American Conservative* (9/29/15)

When we are dealing with young children who are abused by adults (pederasty, child porn, etc.), the penalty for those guilty of the crime should be death.
—Pastor Douglas Wilson, Moscow, Idaho's Christ Church, 1999

Some parents have long thought that the safest place for their children would be the churches and affiliated schools. Sadly, this has not been the case. In 2007 insurance companies that provide liability insurance for Protestant churches reported they had received on average 260 reports of child sex abuse per year. The Catholic Church's own figures are an average 228 "credible accusations" per year.

Abuse is Much Higher than Reported

Given the facts that one in four girls are molested nation-wide and less than half the states require pastors to report these crimes, the actual numbers in both camps are much higher. Pastors and priests have typically claimed a "clergy-penitent" exemption, but this traditional principle is now being questioned.

Most of the Protestant abuse is found among the evangelicals/fundamentalists, whose decentralized 280,000 churches and schools are much more difficult to monitor for these infractions. The tendency to cover-up the abuse is just as widespread as in Catholic parishes, and these crimes have continued for decades.

Long List of Evangelical Schools and Institutions

The list of evangelical schools where sexual abuse has been found is long, but here is a sample: Bob Jones University, Patrick Henry College, Pensacola Christian College, and

Cedarville University. The fundamentalist Institute in Basic Life Principles was forced to shut down because of sexual abuse, and a recent documentary *No Place to Call Home* covered similar crimes in the 1980s at Jesus People USA in Chicago.

Bob Jones University Blames its Victims

After years of denial and blaming the victims, the administrators at ultra fundamentalist Bob Jones University finally admitted they had serious problems. They had been forced to do so by student activists and alumni.

Eight Bob Jones alumni had done their own investigation and found, according to Kathryn Joyce, a “cloistered atmosphere in which abuse victims have been discouraged from coming forward, and in which those who do are routinely blamed and discouraged from reporting it to family members and police.”

Katie Landry: A Deeper Sin in You Caused Your Rape

In her in-depth article “By Grace Alone,” Joyce tells the story of Bob Jones student Katie Landry, who had been raped by a co-worker just before she came to campus. She found herself confused, conflicted, and acting out.

Landry’s campus counselor James Berg told her that “under every sin is another sin; that there is a sin in your life that caused your rape, and we have to find out what that sin was.” This is a typical conservative evangelical diagnosis, which blames the victim for giving into her seducer and/or being flirtatious and wearing provocative clothing.

Landry said: “I already had a plate full of shame when I walked into Dr. Berg’s office, and he put more shame on that, more than I could bear.” She dropped out of college, returned home to Ohio, entered into a marriage that failed, and at age 32 still suffers from her abuse.

Bob Jones Finally Comes Clean

In 2012, Bob Jones hired GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment), an independent group of evangelical pastors, attorneys, psychologists, to investigate. But, after conducting over 100 interviews and just before releasing its report, Bob Jones terminated its contract with GRACE.

A strong reaction from Bob Jones students (including Landry) and alumni, plus public outcry from conservative Christians nation-wide, led Bob Jones to reconsider. A columnist for *The American Conservative* declared: “Bob Jones University will not get away with this cowardly move—thank God!”

Dr. Donn Ketcham: Serial Seducer and Abuser

Another evangelical group, the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE), also hired GRACE, but it, too, pulled out before the report could be published. The focus of the investigation was Dr. Donn Ketcham, a charismatic medical missionary in Bangladesh. His 40-year-long history of sexual misdeeds finally came to light in the case of Kim James, which is the feature story of this month’s *The New Republic* (July 2017).

James and her family arrived at the Bangladesh mission in 1982. When James was 13, Ketcham cultivated an intimate relationship with her that led, he later admitted, to “a minimum of 10 to 15 sexual encounters.” Ketcham started by teaching James how to masturbate, after he had done so in front of her. He said: “This is how guys do it.”

James recalled saying to herself: “This is the doctor, the most godly man here. He would not do anything that’s not right.” Ketcham also performed regular breast and pelvic exams all the mission girls, including the natives.

Kim James had “Lust in its most Base Form”

Back home in Indiana James confessed to her local pastor that she had had sex with Ketcham. Without her parent’s knowledge or permission, two church elders interrogated her. One of them wrote that James suffered from “lust in its most base form, uncontrolled in the body of a spiritually immature woman.”

Ironically, conservative evangelicals give their women full agency only when it comes to their role as temptresses, and less agency to their men when faced with their manipulations. Vice-President Mike Pence’s refusal to have lunch with any woman except his wife is a good example of this sad syndrome.

Kim James was forced to sign a confession in which she had “transgressed God’s Word” by agreeing to a “love affair” with Ketcham. All that James’ parents were told was that there had been just some “inappropriate touching” between the two. They said that they were relieved and that they could “handle that.”

Ketcham Finally Dismissed and now Serves Life Sentence

Ketcham was forced to leave the mission because of “immorality,” which was taken to mean adultery, not child sex abuse. Women at the mission had complained about his advances and seductions since 1967, but it was usually they who were punished not Ketcham.

The ABWE finally hired an investigator and 280-page report recounted numerous cases of Ketcham seducing women and girls going back to the 1960s. Only after reading the report did James’ parents learned that her young daughter had been raped.

Back in Michigan and still practicing medicine, Ketcham, according to David Sessions, “was accused of abusing a six-year-old patient while conducting a medical exam. At 86 he faces a life sentence for first-degree sexual assault—half a century after he started abusing women and girls in Bangladesh” (*The New Republic*, July, 2007).

Steven Sitler: Serial Pedophile in Moscow’s Christ Church

Steven Sitler grew up in a conservative Presbyterian church in Colville, Washington. His mother was a follower of Douglas Wilson, a former student of mine and pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. While in Colville, Sitler was accused of molesting a 2-year-old girl while visiting a church home. He later admitted to committing this crime on multiple occasions in Virginia, Washington, and then Idaho. The number of his victims, all below the age of ten, may have exceeded 20.

Sitler moved to Moscow in August 2003 to attend Wilson’s New St. Andrews College. NSA students are offered board and room in Christ Church family homes. As a boarder in one such home, Sitler started abusing the girls (and one boy) almost on a nightly basis, and he was found out only after a visiting girl reported her abuse to her father in March 2005.

The crimes were reported to police, but Sitler was not arrested. He sought refuge at his Colville home, but he was excommunicated by his church there. Free to molest at will, he did not appear in court until September 26, 2005. Christ elders were not apprised of the case until

November 11, 2005, and members of Christ Church did not learn these crimes until the story broke in the local paper in June 2006.

Sitler Violates Parole Three Times

In a plea agreement Sitler confessed to one count of lewd conduct with a minor under 16. The prosecuting attorney had contacted all the victims' families, but they chose not press any additional charges. Sitler was given a life sentence with the possibility of parole. Sitler served 20 months in prison, but he has violated his parole at least three times: he admitted to voyeurism, stalking a young woman in a bikini, and then, most egregious of all, being sexually stimulated by his infant son.

On Wilson's suggestion and with the permission of the presiding judge, Sitler was married, after two approved dates, to an NSA student. The judge accepted Wilson's argument that marriage would be good therapy for Sitler's sexual deviance. Prosecuting attorney Bill Thompson disagreed: "Everybody would love for Mr. Sitler to become a normal person, but the fact is he is not. He is a serial child sexual abuser."

"State's Worst Fears have been Realized"

After the incident with his son, Thompson declare that "the state's worst fears have appeared to have been realized." Wilson prefers to focus on the fact that Sitler was charged with only one crime, but Thompson wrote that "the volume and extent of acts by the defendant are greater than the investigator's documentation."

Although Wilson's blog has over 100,000 followers, he is widely shunned in the evangelical community. His defense of slavery in his booklet *Southern Slavery as It Was* finds little support except among his fellow neo-Confederates, and his own version of Calvinism was overwhelming rejected by a vote of approximately 1,350 to 50 at the 35th Assembly of the conservative Presbyterian Church of America.

Douglas Wilson: Child Rapists Should be Executed

Wilson's handling of the Sitler case has also been criticized. This is Rod Dreher of *The American Conservative*: "How did anybody in Christ Church think it was a good idea to encourage and enable a young woman in their community to marry a convicted pedophile? I cannot comprehend it. And I cannot comprehend the apparent unwillingness of the congregation to hold themselves and their pastor accountable for this catastrophe that has befallen the Sitler wife and child."

Wilson's plea for leniency in this case and his acceptance of Sitler in his church family stands in stark contrast with his own "crawling over cut glass" biblical theology: "When we are dealing with young children who are abused by adults (pederasty, child porn, etc.), the penalty for those guilty of the crime should be death" (*Fidelity* [Canon Press, 1999], p. 85).

Natalie Greenfield Seduced by Christ Church Seminarian

Natalie Greenfield of Moscow tells a frighteningly similar story about her abuse by Jamin Wight, a seminary student at Christ Church's Greyfriars. Wight was a boarder in Greenfield's home, and when she was 13 he, as she described, "groomed" her for a 2-year sexual relationship. She admits that she was smitten by this handsome 23-year-old man, and he started to control

her behavior and her dress. Wright said that he could not help himself because she was so beautiful and flirtatious.

In 2005 Greenfield finally went to the police and filed charges. Many people in Christ Church wrote character witness letters for Wight, and he served only 4 months of a 2-year sentence. (He also did not have to register as a sex offender.) Wilson and Christ Church elders turn on Greenfield's father saying that he had failed to protect his daughter.

Greenfield continued to attend church hoping that someone—the women surely—would offer their support. Instead she was shunned and she decided to leave Christ Church. Wilson harassed her with three successive emails warning her that she had to meet with church elders for repentance. After she refused to meet with them, she was disfellowshipped.

Greenfield is now happily married and has four children. She speaks out regularly about child sexual abuse. She also sings her heart out as a blues soloist in various venues, including some of my Unitarian choir performances.

Nick Gier of Moscow taught religion and philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. Read Gier's articles on Wilson at www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/Wilson.htm.