

A message from Peter J. Leithart

I write this with a great deal of reluctance. I have refrained from making any public statements about the recent internet turmoil over two sexual abuse incidents that took place in Moscow, Idaho while I worked there as a faculty member at New St Andrews College and served as pastor of Trinity Reformed Church. I have been concerned that anything I say would add fuel to an overheated debate.

Besides, I'm ambivalent about the wisdom of hashing through these terrible events on media that are poorly suited to the careful, sensitive treatment that sexual abuse demands. Evil must be exposed, but I doubt that the internet is the best place to do it. Inevitably, the ones who are most wholly forgotten are the ones who were most deeply damaged.

A few friends, though, have urged me to say something publicly, since, as has been reported, I was pastor of one of the abusers. These friends thought it would be useful for me to clarify my actions and offer my retrospective assessment of my performance as pastor. Other leaders from Trinity or Christ Church might see things differently, and my comments below are not intended as criticism of them or anyone else. I speak only for myself.

First, I was pastor at Trinity Reformed Church when a member of the church, Jamin Wight, was charged with sexually abuse of a minor, a young teenage girl. By the time I learned of the abuse, it had ceased.

Second, the report implies that I sided with Jamin. That is accurate in some ways. I did sit with him in court, as the report claims; I visited and wrote to Jamin while he was in his court-ordered program; I continued to be his friend and pastor. I believed, and still believe, that I had a duty to provide pastoral counsel and care to Jamin. Neither I nor the other elders at Trinity ignored or excused Jamin's sin, and there was no attempt on my part or Doug Wilson's to cover it up.

Third, it is true, as was reported, that Jamin remained a member "in good standing" at Trinity. That means that he did not come under formal church discipline and was not excommunicated. It does not mean we excused his sin. We rebuked him, and I and the elders of Trinity admonished him repeatedly to repent fully. At the time, I believed he was repentant.

It is clear now that I made major errors of judgment. Fundamentally, I misjudged Jamin, badly. I thought he was a godly young man who had fallen into sin. That was wrong. In the course of trying to pastor Jamin through other crises in his life, I came to realize that he is deceptive and highly manipulative, and that I allowed him to manipulate me. A number of the things I said about Jamin to the congregation and court at the time his abuse was uncovered were spun in Jamin's favor; I am ashamed to realize that I used Jamin's talking points. Though I never doubted that Jamin was guilty, I trusted his account of the circumstances more readily and longer than I should have, and conversely I disbelieved the victim's parents (to the best of my recollection, I had no

direct contact with the victim, who was a member of Christ Church). I should have seen through Jamin, and didn't.

As a result, I didn't appreciate how much damage Jamin did and I was naive about the effect that the abuse had on the victim's family. I recently asked her and her parents to forgive my pastoral failures, which they have done.

- Peter J. Leithart

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