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Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers

Harding School of Theology

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### Footnotes: #MeToo #ChurchToo

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# Footnotes<sup>1</sup>

Curated Resources for Ministers

Welcome to Footnotes.

You don't have to tell me, I already know; you often skip the footnotes. I know, I know. If they were that important they would've made it into the actual text. For many, footnotes are like those "Yes, I Have Read the Terms and Conditions" statements that you check before downloading an app. If you hate them, you can know that publishers do too. That is they often forbid authors from using them, and instead insist on endnotes, which hide the evidence in the back. It is the literary equivalent of hiding the smoking gun in the janitor's closet and wondering why the jury didn't reach a verdict.

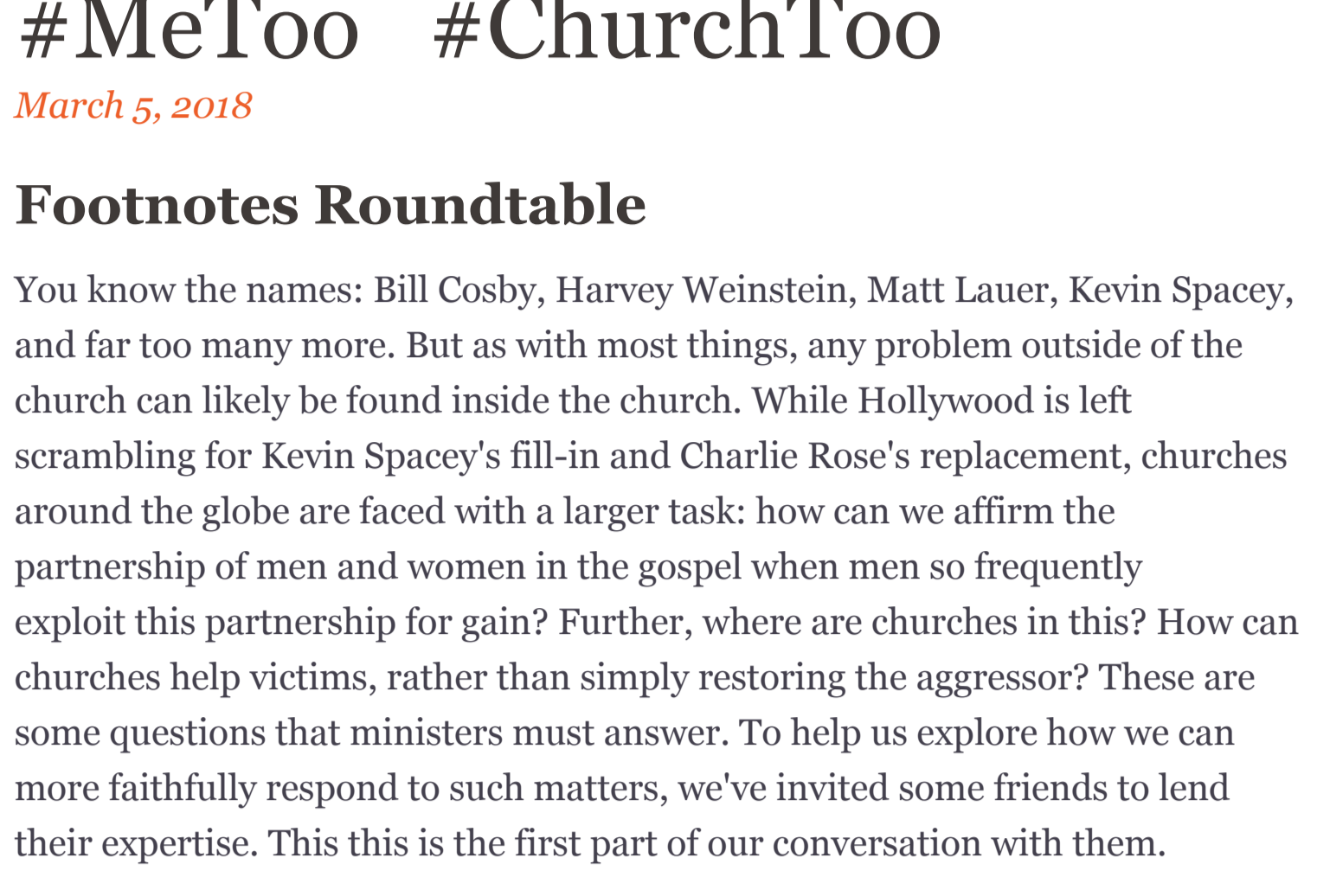
But what if we viewed footnotes as things that saved us time and were helpful? Occasionally, an author packs a note with references that document the entire history of a topic. In other cases, they define an uncommon word or introduce a new book.

But you are busy. You might be preaching every Sunday, and feeling like your weeks only have four days. You might be funding a church while watching the demands of networking, organizing, and fundraising devour your time. Maybe you are a church leader who wants resource recommendations, but never really had an educational experience that helped you sift through the piles of information. Maybe you are just really curious.

If so, Footnotes might be for you. Here is what Footnotes will do. It will provide a quick, accessible resources on the topics that matter most to you. Each issue will feature interviews, book reviews, and links to resources that will enrich your ministry. It's like having a seminary library in abbreviated form, on your phone. Best of all, it's free.

Not your thing? Go ahead and unsubscribe at the bottom.

If you're still here, welcome, let's see what's out there.



## #MeToo #ChurchToo

March 5, 2018

### Footnotes Roundtable

You know the names: Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, Kevin Spacey, and far too many more. But as with most things, any problem outside of the church can likely be found inside the church. While Hollywood is left scrambling for Kevin Spacey's fill-in and Charlie Rose's replacement, churches around the globe are faced with a larger task: how can we affirm the partnership of men and women in the gospel when men so frequently exploit this partnership for gain? Further, where are churches in this? How can churches help victims, rather than simply restoring the aggressor? These are some questions that ministers must answer. To help us explore how we can more faithfully respond to such matters, we've invited some friends to lend their expertise. This this is the first part of our conversation with them.

**Jimmy Hinton** is the Minister for the Somerset Church of Christ in Somerset, Pennsylvania. He speaks nationwide to help equip churches to protect themselves against sexual predators.

**Ron Clark** is the Minister for the Agape Church of Christ in Portland, Oregon. He leads local efforts in Portland to support victims of domestic violence, while also speaking and writing on the subject.

**Linda Oxford** is the Clinical Services Director for Agape Child and Family Services in Memphis, Tennessee. In addition to her clinical experience, she also routinely consults with churches, particularly in relationship to matters of race, injustice, domestic violence, and sexual assault.

**One recurring theme in many of the conversations around #MeToo and #ChurchToo is the way that we are quick to forgive (or ignore) the aggressor while doing little to attend to the needs of the victim. How might we reverse this habit?**

**Jimmy Hinton:** The best way to reverse it is to understand that God's foundation is righteousness and justice. If we get God's foundation wrong, everything else that we build upon it is going to sway with cultural trends. Bad theology leads to bad practices, and right now we have a lot of bad theology. Jesus never taught people to embrace the oppressor at the expense of the oppressed. He overturned tables, made whips of cords, spoke of tying large millstones around necks and drowning those people in the depth of the sea, mentioned chopping people up and throwing them into the fire, and said that what happened to Sodom was better than what would happen to his listeners. Jesus was graphic because abuse is graphic. Jesus' first response to oppression was not forgiveness—it was righteousness and justice.

We have a very dangerous and shallow theology of forgiveness that enables and empowers abusers to continue to abuse. Not only are churches quick to forgive the aggressor, they also demand that the oppressed forgive their abuser. In doing this, we place a burden on the shoulders of the victim that Jesus didn't place on them. I've listened to countless survivors of abuse tell me horror stories where their abusers were welcomed with open arms and they were kicked out of the church because they weren't at a point where they could forgive him. Forgiveness isn't unconditional, yet many people teach that it is.

When I consult with churches, they always cave to the abuser when face to face with him. I've never seen an exception. Abusers are wolves who masquerade as sheep. They are incredibly skilled at pretending to be remorseful.

Just a few weeks ago, Rachael Denhollander, one of US Olympic doctor Larry Nassar's more than 260 victims, wrote an article called [My Larry Nassar Testimony Went Viral, But There's More to the Gospel Than Forgiveness](#). She wrote this because, out of her powerful 36 minute victim impact statement, church leaders latched on to one sentence where she referenced forgiveness while they ignored all that she said about justice. She went on to say in her article, "Church is one of the least safe places to acknowledge abuse because the way it is counseled is, more often than not, damaging to the victim."

**Ron Clark:** I think that much of this has to do with our view of *forgiveness*, *justice*, and *repentance*. The Bible teaches us some important lessons concerning oppression, abuse, and healing for survivors.

Our first step is to listen to survivors. While #MeToo has shown us that there are a large number of males who have assaulted females, it also is uncovering many, many others who failed to help the victims. We have to admit, especially as faith leaders, that we have not protected victims nor have we heard them and validated them. Repentance needs to happen for offenders and those of us who have silenced victims.

The word repentance in the Hebrew (*shub/shuv*) means to turn around or change direction. This involves not just simply saying "I'm sorry" but a full change of behavior. The one repenting goes through "humiliation" to not only feel the pain of those they hurt, but to make amends by becoming vulnerable. *Yom Kippur* is a day where God's people "shuv" and grieve their sins. What we also understand is that "repentance precedes forgiveness." Jesus also makes the claim that in order to worship acceptably, a person needs to repent and "make amends" to the one they hurt before standing in front of God (Matt 5:23-26). If we want to help offenders heal and find forgiveness they must "repent."

Unfortunately many American Christians have neglected the repentance part of the healing by limiting it to an apology. People cannot truly forgive or reconcile if they are not validated or offered permission to express hurt to those who oppress them. This is also true in our relationship with God—we need to repent and change our behavior, not just say "I'm sorry God, I'm a sinner..."

What I have learned from working with those in addition is that "making amends" is one of the most important steps for one in addition to address. This is key to the healing of others as well as themselves.

**Linda Oxford:** The most important thing we can do to support victims is to affirm that they have been wronged; that we, the church, have failed in our responsibility to protect them from harm, and that we, the church, commit to doing whatever we can to protect them from further harm and promote their recovery. This action requires that we recognize and affirm that any sexual interaction between a church leader and a member of the congregation to whom he or she is not married constitutes misconduct - an abuse of the church leader's power, privilege, and the pastoral role and relationship, and exploitation of a vulnerable other. A sexual relationship between a congregant and a church leader is not an "affair," a mutual and consensual relationship in which both parties are equally accountable, but rather a form of sexual abuse and exploitation involving church leaders' use of their positions in the church to obtain personal sexual gratification. The imbalance of power in these relationships is the most important consideration in challenging the idea that any clergy/parishioner sexual relationship can ever be consensual.

We must hold church leaders accountable for setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries that protect congregants from being harmed by those who are ministering to them; just as we require doctors, therapists, teachers, and other professionals to absolutely avoid using their patients, clients, and students for their own personal emotional and sexual gratification. In response to the unavoidable temptation and opportunity for professionals to exploit vulnerable others who depend upon them, codes of ethics have been established by nearly every human service profession to protect individuals from being harmed by those who serve them. The ethical imperative of "First, do no harm," is not a suggestion, but a professional expectation of all human service providers.

The prevalence of sexual misconduct by church leaders exceeds the incidence of sexual misconduct reported in virtually every other human service profession. Over 12% of clergy report having had intercourse with a church member to who they were not married, up to 39% admit having engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior, and as many as 76% report knowing of clergy who have had sexual contact with a church member. One study (Cooper-White, 1995) suggested that between 1 in 8 and 1 in 3 clergy have crossed sexual boundaries with congregants. Another study (Flynn, 2003) indicated that clergy sexually exploit congregants at twice the rate of secular therapists.

**Recently, national news outlets picked up the story that Memphis's Highpoint Church pastor Andy Savage received a standing ovation by the congregation after it was revealed that he had made sexually lewd advances toward a minor at his former church in Texas. On one hand, we want to practice justice and hold leaders accountable. On the other hand, we want to practice forgiveness. If Highpoint had called and asked you to advise them before this all came out, what counsel would you have given them?**

**Hinton:** According to Savage, Highpoint knew about his past "incident" when they hired him 15 years ago. I would ask the church what Mr. Savage told them at the time and what they did to verify his account. I've never consulted with a church who has checked a registered sex offender's records against his or her own "confession." When I look up public records, I've found that the offender has lied 100% of the time. I watched lead pastor Chris Conlee's sermon the day of Mr. Savage's public apology. Mr. Conlee strongly appealed to his close friendship with Andy Savage as he publicly vouched for his character. This is a fatal mistake that church leaders do to unknowingly protect abusers and keep victims silent. Our friendship and working relationship with someone has absolutely nothing to do with whether they are an abuser or not. I had to report my own father, a former minister, to the police when an allegation of abuse arose. If I would have appealed to my love for the him and his character as a father and minister, I never would have gone to the police. Chris Conlee gave an alleged abuser the stage, defended him, and gave him a voice while his victim was never given that opportunity.

I'm deeply troubled that Jules Woodson's account of Mr. Savage's alleged sexual abuse is completely different than Andy's. Highpoint has a responsibility to look into this with due diligence and to find out what really happened, who knew about it, and whether or not laws were broken in Texas where the abuse took place. If I were advising Highpoint before this became public, I would have advised Chris Conlee and the leadership team to contact Jules Woodson and her family to verify Savage's account. Then I would advise them to contact his previous church in Texas and find out whether Savage resigned or was fired, and for what specific reason. Then I would advise them to contact the police in Texas to see if a report was ever filed. Highpoint's poor handling of this has come back to haunt them. Mr. Savage was given a leave of absence and I suspect there will be a public outcry against lead pastor Chris Conlee. This all would have been avoided and a survivor would have found healing a long time ago if it was handled well from the beginning.

**Clark:** My advice would have been for them to work first with the victims by supporting, encouraging, and listening to them. God begins by hearing the cries of the oppressed. Andy Savage would need to resign and spend time in prayer and start meeting with an offender management counselor/ interventionist. What is important is not only Andy's confession but the victims' healing and Andy's behavior change. Surrounding offenders has proven to create more victims in the long run.

I think that the public confession would need to come many, many months later —assuming Savage did the difficult work of repenting and validating those he hurt. He also needs to understand that hiding sin is an abomination to the God who sees and knows all. This would include not only his victims, but the church that hired him as a youth worker without knowing what he had done to shame Jesus and the church.

**Oxford:** In my experience, the most common mistake churches make in responding to allegations or disclosures of misconduct is attempting to manage the situation internally. Churches leaders, many of whom receive no formal training or compensation for their church roles and have other full-time employment responsibilities, can become overwhelmed by the requirements of responding to allegations or disclosures of church leader misconduct and adequately attending to protection and prevention. All too often they attempt to address these tasks with no external support or assistance.

At that point, they must simultaneously attempt to respond to the demands of the crisis situation; learn about community standards, legal requirements, and best practice recommendations; and defend their actions to the congregation, community and media. At the same time, they must manage their own emotional responses to allegations or disclosure that a leader in whom they placed unconditional trust may be untrustworthy. Faced with such daunting responsibilities, leaders in healthy churches consult with appropriate experts who can provide them with reliable guidance, direction, and support not only in successfully leading their church through such crises when misconduct occurs, but in putting in place appropriate protection and prevention measures.

Prevention resources available to church leaders include their church's liability insurance carrier, community advocacy and training programs focused on protection of vulnerable others, and professional consultants who can assist them in protection and prevention initiatives.



## DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

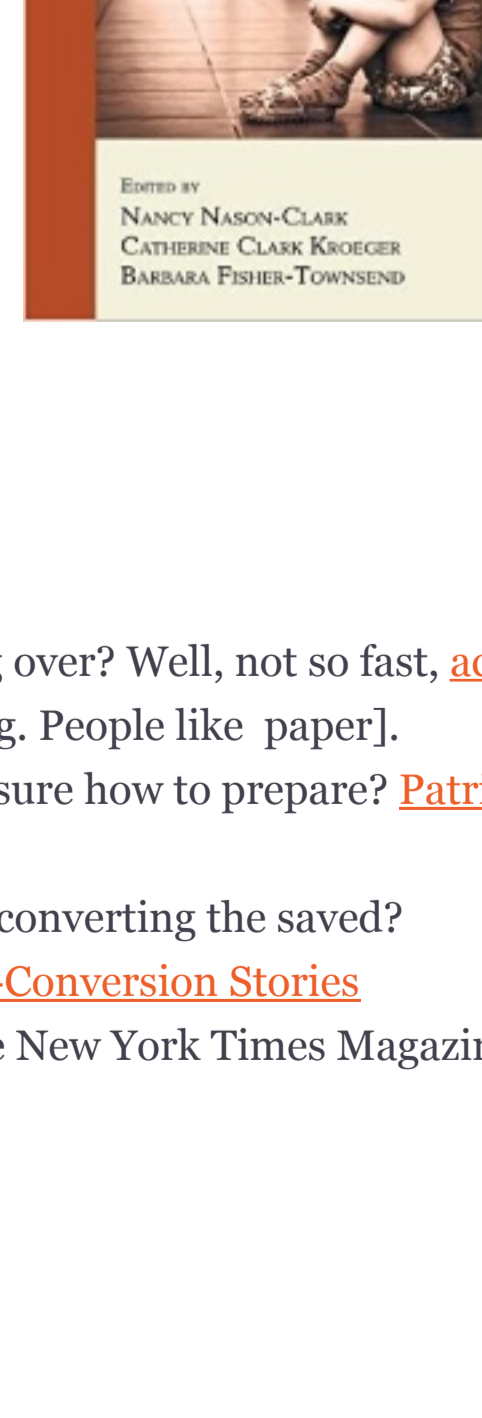
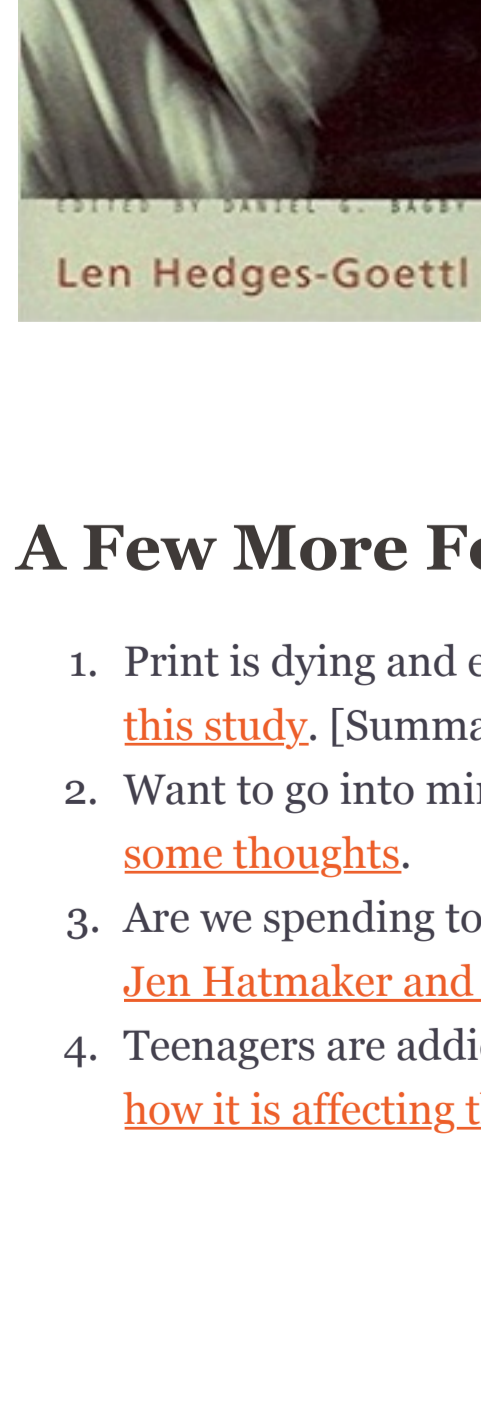
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[Three Ways the Church Can Love Sexual Assault Survivors](#)

[God's Message to #MeToo Victims and Perpetrators](#)

[What Does the Bible Say About Domestic Abuse?](#)

[God's Message to #MeToo Victims](#)



### A Few More Footnotes.

1. Print is dying and ebooks are taking over? Well, not so fast, [according to this study](#). (Summary: Article is long. People like paper).
2. Want to go into ministry but aren't sure how to prepare? [Patrick Mead has some thoughts](#).
3. Are we spending too much time de-converting the saved? [Ten Hatmaker and the Power of De-Conversion Stories](#)
4. Jenagers are addicted to porn. The New York Times Magazine asked [how it is affecting them](#).



FOOTNOTES helps church leaders discover the resources that will improve and sustain their ministries. It will regularly feature interviews, book recommendations, site reviews, and editorials. It is a project of [r.turner@harding.edu](#). Complaints can be sent to [his Juno account](#).

UPCOMING  
Part 2: #MeToo #ChurchToo  
Monday, March 12

Talking Trump?  
Monday, March 26

