

Southern Poverty Law Center

Intelligence Report

Neo-Confederates

Idaho Pastor a Hard-Liner, With an Exception or Two

Doug Wilson, pastor of a radical church in Moscow, Idaho, and co-author of an infamous booklet describing antebellum slavery as an easygoing "life of plenty," has always seemed to project a persona of smug and self-satisfied arrogance.

When hundreds of students, history professors, town officials and others decried the racism and sorry scholarship of his *Southern Slavery, As It Was*, Wilson mocked them all publicly, scoffing at what he called the "intoleristas." He continued with a tit-for-tat attack on the "racism" of Abraham Lincoln and Ted Kennedy.

When a local professor revealed later in 2004 that Wilson's booklet contained 22 passages plagiarized from a discredited 1974 academic treatise, Wilson scoffed again, deriding the "local Banshees" who criticized him over what he portrayed as a mere citation problem. Wilson went on to say that his Moscow-based Canon Press was issuing a corrected version of the booklet -- correct in its citations, that is, but maintaining unchanged its portrayal of happy and well-fed slaves whose relationship with their masters was described as one of "mutual confidence and affection."

Now, Wilson is back in the news. This summer, the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News* published a story on "rumors" that Wilson, who controls an extreme-right religious empire in Moscow, and his New Saint Andrews College had tried to "cover up" serial sexual molestations by a college student -- molestations of very young boys and girls carried out over several years. Although the newspaper quoted none of them, many people were angry that Wilson had failed to notify families in his Christ Church for eight months after Steven Sitler confessed to him in March 2005. One church family with young children had boarded Sitler, and others welcomed him as a visitor in their homes (Sitler molested one 2-year-old girl in a similar visiting situation in Colville, Wash.). Critics complained that Wilson's lack of action had eliminated the possibility of identifying other victims in the community.

Wilson and college officials told the newspaper that they had immediately kicked Sitler out of school and notified police of his crimes, but decided not to inform members of the public because of concerns for victims' privacy.

Five months after Sitler's confession, another man who had been boarded by a Christ Church family while he studied to become a minister there was arrested and ultimately pleaded guilty to lewd conduct with an underage girl. When details of the matter came up on a local blog run by a disgruntled Wilson follower, part of the pastor's response was to liken the blogger to "a sucking chest wound."

The father of the girl in the second incident told the *Intelligence Report* that church officials tried to keep that quiet as well. At one point, he said, they threatened to bring him under church discipline for failing to protect his daughter. "It would be like me getting robbed and the police coming over and arresting me because I didn't have five locks on the door, only one," he said. "It was just bizarre."

What may have been most remarkable about the entire affair was Wilson's role in the case of Sitler, who he ministered to after Sitler was caught. Wilson wrote the sentencing judge in Sitler's case, describing him as "most responsive" and "completely honest" and asking that criminal penalties be "measured and limited."

That might seem like an understandable request coming from a man's pastor. But Doug Wilson is no normal pastor. He is a biblical hard-liner, a man who in numerous books and speeches is quick to advocate the most draconian punishments of the Old Testament for all kinds of offenses, some quite minor. And that applies to the Sitler case directly, judging from what Wilson wrote in his 1999 book *Fidelity*: "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."

Except, apparently, when Pastor Wilson decides otherwise.

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