

Paedophilia and Silence: A Finland Swedish Case Study

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Abstract: In the year 2009, in a small Lutheran revivalist movement, a Læstadian community in western Finland, a case of paedophilia was disclosed. Paedophilia is known as a crime since the end of the nineteenth century. It turned out that several members of the community had been aware of what was happening but that, for some forty years, they hid their knowledge from one another. After several decades of silence some of the paedophile's victims, i.e., his grandchildren, decided to reveal their memories. Everybody could read about their fate in both the local press and newspapers published in Sweden, and what they learnt, certainly, caused vivid reactions. In this article, interviews with four members are analysed, and the questions posed to the oral material about what had happened are why the members of the community turned a blind eye although the man's behaviour was a crime and how they avoided revealing what they knew. It turned out that the community members subsided for reasons supported by religion, society, pedagogics, cognisance and economy. Laziness and cowardliness were not the most important reasons for silence, although they were elements in the process of co-dependency. The strategy for not being obliged to expose their highly appreciated preacher and Sunday school teacher was to refer to his religious expertise.

Keywords: Paedophilia, Disclosure, Silence, Læstadians, Narrative, Cultural Pattern, Co-dependence

1. Introduction

According to the Finnish law paedophilia is a crime. Only when a child is sixteen years old is non-compulsory, deliberate sexual intercourse legally accepted [1]. Fornication with an infant was first mentioned in the penal code of Finland in 1889 [2]. In 2009, in the town of Jakobstad in Finland (Fi. Pietarsaari), local and Swedish newspapers unveiled a case of paedophilia that had occurred some decades earlier. However, it had never been exposed and the paedophile was dead when the press highlighted the case. Here, the intention is to answer the questions why people around the paedophile concealed his deeds and how people avoided talking about them instead of stopping him from molesting more children. The starting point is that there might be factors that support silence other than sheer laziness and cowardliness.

2. The Town Jakobstad and the Læstadian Community

The town of Jakobstad is situated on the western coast of

Finland. It is a rather small city, some nineteen-thousand people live there, earning their living in education, small industry, enterprise, care, service and other professions. Their main language is Swedish.¹

A distinguishing feature of the town is the rather large number of Lutheran and other Protestant churches. Folklore has it that there is a church on every street corner. One of them belongs to the Læstadian community. The Swedish clergyman Lars Levi Læstadius (1800–1861) introduced a Christian, Lutheran revivalist movement around the middle of the nineteenth century. He worked in northern Sweden, mainly among the Sámi people [4-6]. The movement spread all around the Arctic area in Europe and in the USA. Today it is international, but it is most significant in Finland. There are seven different factions of the Læstadian movement holding more than 1,000 members, and groups consisting of a smaller number of members are numerous. The movement consists of so-called associations of peace. The subdivision mostly represented in Finland (around 90,000 members) is called *gammallæstadianismen* (Old Læstadianism) [7]. The

¹ Finland is a bilingual country. Some 300,000 speak Swedish as their everyday language. In Jakobstad 56 % of the inhabitants are Swedish speakers [3].

Finland-Swedish Ostrobothnian associations of peace belong to a specific subgroup called *Rauhan Sana* (The Word of Peace) and have some 10,000 members [8, 9]. Here I will stick to the term community when I write about the specific association of peace in Jakobstad.

A strong personal recognition of sin is one of the community's characteristics. The awareness of sin is exposed in emotionally charged confessions and, often public, forgiveness [10]. Its members are faithful to the Bible, to the works written by Martin Luther and by Lars Levi Læstadius. One can proceed from the circumstances, on the one hand, that secular Finnish law forbids paedophilia, and on the other, that all adult members of the community were aware of the meaning of Jesus's statement: 'And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea' [11]. Also, it became obvious that the interviewees were ashamed of what had happened, which indicates that they were aware of the turpitude in paedophilia.

3. Interviews and Research Methods

In 2009 some newspapers and blogs published articles about an evangelist who had assaulted his grandchildren [12–15]. In the community, this person was very influential, and he was highly respected. Certainly, this piece of news was sensational. Læstadians are often industrious, hardworking people and, due to their specific belief, they constitute a partly separate group of inhabitants in town. Consequently, there are also preconceptions and suspicions about them. The newspapers' message was dramatic to all those who were sceptical towards Læstadians and even more so to the members of this very community. The interviews were conducted several decades after the paedophile had been active, but only three years after the newspapers had published their reports about what had happened. In March 2012 there was an opportunity to interview a couple of community members,² in order to obtain knowledge about how they reacted to the newspapers and how they formulated their thoughts about what had happened. Only thanks to the effort of a local colleague³ was it possible to reach somebody who was willing to talk about these difficult and delicate issues.

It became clear that people did know about the evangelist's deeds, but they did not expose them. For instance, the evangelist's wife knew that something was going on for, when she sent her husband off to visit the sauna together with his grandchildren, she called on other sauna participants, obviously one or several sons, to keep an eye on him [18]. During the interview this passage triggered an interest in finding out why the members of the community concealed and neglected what they knew and how they hid what was going on. What drove them to be silent? Was it the

general taciturnity of people from Finland that did not even arouse the desire to speak? There are a lot of stories about quiet Finns. Silence is one of the characteristics of many a Finn, but being quiet is also an idea cherished by both them and foreigners.⁴

3.1. Interviews and Ethical Matters

For this article three deep interviews were investigated with four participants in all, in order to see how they expressed themselves about silence and neglect in the case of paedophilia. Anna [16] was married to James [17]; they were both in their seventies. Tom [18], who was around fifty, and Bert [19], some forty years old, were alone with the interviewer during the talks. James's participation was a surprise. He entered when Anna and the interviewer had their coffee break and took part out of sheer interest. Each interview lasted over an hour. Due to the coffee, Anna's and James's talk was even one hour longer. Also, at the coffee table the recording carried on.

The interviews are transcribed and kept in the archive Cultura at Åbo Akademi University. In material as sensible as this, ethical considerations are crucial. Paedophilia is an enormity, but here it is not the task to disclose individual persons involved nor to tell, in detail, about what occurred. Consequently, the interviewees are presented with assumed names, but the perpetrator remains anonymous. As it happened, nobody mentioned his name. Here, designations of his societal position, such as 'preacher', 'evangelist', 'grandfather' or other titles depending on the context are used. Also, the victims remain arcane. All interviewees read and approved of the transcripts. Although offered anonymity none of them wished to be secret. Here, because the social weave in Jakobstad is close, it is wise still to use pseudonyms and to hide their identities as far as possible. Certainly, the scholar's personal experience of dealing with this material is important for the formulations, but she decided to handle the material, the topic, and the text as dispassionately as possible, more like a medical doctor diagnosing a difficult disease.

There is no personal relationship between the interviewer and any of the interviewees nor with the community or the movement.

3.2. Research Methods

Among other things, a folklorist, i.e., a scholar interested in cultural patterns in people's ways of narrating and formulating their thoughts, investigates the cultural pattern of being silent in a critical situation. Semi-structured deep interviews seemed to be appropriate. To begin with, the interviewees saw a couple of written questions but during the conversation the interviewees were not interrupted when they deviated from this path because a more free-and-easy

2 The interviews are part of a project called 'Toleransens gränser' [Limits to Tolerance], financed by the Academy of Finland.

3 This colleague underlined that the paedophile belonged to a dysfunctional family.

4 For instance, two Finns met in a bar. They were silent for a long while. Then one of them said 'cheers' and the other one asked: 'Did we come here to talk or to drink?' Another story refers to a person who was asked to read the text on a friend's doormat. That would be the best kind of contact for a day [20, 21, 22].

discussion would be methodologically more correct and give more ample inputs than if the scholar received answers only to the ready-formulated questions. The conversation consisted of a dialogue between the interviewees and the interviewee. The material mainly consists of oral accounts. The interviewees reported what they had heard about the paedophile, but they did not have any personal experience of paedophilia in their own bodies. Personal experience narratives were relevant when they talked about their own reactions when they learnt that the preacher had been a paedophile. Certainly, the interviewer's reactions to what the interviewees said may have influenced them. This, however, is not regarded as a problem in folklore studies because it takes (at least) two equal partners to create an interview [23].

The analyses of the texts were conducted by close reading, i.e., a 'thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns' [24]. This means that the text, be it written or spoken, influences the reader or listener, and helps him or her to see or hear messages that are not clearly expressed. During the close reading, there was an ongoing comparison of the interviews with facts about Læstadianism read in scholarly works. In this way it became possible to see what was idiosyncratic and what belonged to the generally accepted and practised Læstadian belief and way of living. To believing Læstadians their belief forms the solid foundation of ethics and morals.

Certainly, close reading is subjective and, consequently, the interpretation is also subjective. On the one hand, one may maintain that there is no possibility to generalise any knowledge from this kind of subjective reading. On the other hand, the perspective is intertextual and takes into consideration what other interviewees had talked about in other investigations and what was mentioned in literature. Both approaches are needed to give a multifaceted image of this issue.

4. Reasons for the Members of the Community to Conceal Their Knowledge About Paedophilia

It was only when the newspapers wrote about the paedophile and when her son had informed her of the situation that Anna reacted:

U: Did you then tell anybody further when you knew what your son had said?

A: No.

U: Why not?

A: We just talked to one another here at home, for I dared not believe it, not before it came from more directions, so then we discussed it with my siblings.

U: So, then you were actually rather silent.

A: Yes, yes, I didn't dare, but then when it, when it came out publicly, then I had many friends from my time as a politician who came to speak to me, and I must say that it has been very nice [16].

However, the interviewees did not talk about any

conversations about the actions of the paedophile at the time when he was active.

Certainly, the neglect of paedophilia can be explained through laziness or through the Finnish taciturnity. Another easy explanation would be cowardliness. Generally, in Finland one should not interfere in other people's lives. This would be the simplest ways to let paedophiles continue.

But are there other reasons for staying silent about such dreadful deeds? Regarding what factors can explain why people ignored the children's agonising situation, an analysis and an interpretation of the three interviews demonstrates a good deal of reasons. The interviews contain statements that hint at religious, social, pedagogical, cognitive and economic factors. In reality they merge but, for the sake of clarity, here they are emphasised one by one.

4.1. Religious Factors

Religion seems to serve as the foundation for all efforts to understand and explain why silence was an ideal. Recognition of sin and forgiveness are two factors to be considered. Consequently, it is worth pondering how it was possible for the evangelist, aware of his sins, to repeatedly harass children.

The Bible is central and underlies the Læstadian belief in a scriptural way. It offers patterns for a good life. Moreover, the strong personal recognition of sin leads to a need for confession and forgiveness [25]. This concerns all the members of a community, even children and preachers. Forgiveness must be given upon repentance. The confessions are emotional and often publicly performed. A pastor or a layman has this mission to forgive, publicly at a meeting, or privately in an encounter between the unhappy member and the listener. Moreover, any member of the community is regarded as a person who is suitable for the task of listening to a confession and forgiving. After a sin is forgiven it goes into 'the bottomless sea of mercy' and should never again come to the fore:

And it is this forgiveness that has been the strongest tool, if you grow in a Christian family, and especially within Læstadianism, it has been important here that, that what is forgiven, that we, we shall not fish in the bottomless sea of mercy [...] think what you will be accused of because you have been fishing in the bottomless sea of mercy, well, I will tell you what would happen. You would have a death sentence over you [...] [19].

An image of a deep and wide, inexhaustible sea with rolling waves has been known in Swedish religious literature since 1555 and refers to an ocean filled with sins. Consequently, to forgive is to send sins into the sea to stay there. This is what Jesus was said to have done once [26, 27, 28]. The expression is still current in religious texts [29]. What is forgiven no longer exists. Certainly, Bert spoke about a sea of mercy which is interpreted here as another expression for a place where sins can be thrown away never to be relevant again. Oblivion can be a kind of mercy.

This illustration of the sea does not mean that it is easy to fail and be forgiven but it means that the sin is forgiven and

should not be repeated. What is in the sea of mercy must not be mentioned any more [19], what is forgiven no longer irritates anybody [18]. This certainly permits people not to talk about it, even when it is paedophilia. On the contrary, it supports silence and neglect. In this way, silence is a strategy that emanates from and proves a correct belief.

However, Bert was critical towards this viewpoint. He said that forgiveness helps to forget, bury, and blank out, i.e., to neglect what is wrong [19]. Certainly, the evangelist was cognisant of his problematic disposition, and he even repeated his acts, but the community closed their eyes. It is not certain that he did not repent, for Bert said that the evangelist had asked for and received forgiveness, but this was said in the hallway after the interview, and at that time, in this respect, the evangelist's behaviour did not seem important. Consequently, there is no strict documentation. If he did repent, his sin was also in the deep sea of mercy and, consequently, impossible to consider.

It seems that the members of the community had a respect for the powers of a preacher that was stronger than the feeling of justice. The respect grew into a position in which habit discouraged reflection. Consequently, out of habit the members of the community continued to feel respect [16]. Habit also directed the grandfather to his children, and habit let his wife find a way out of her difficult situation as a person who knew but dared not object. The children were molested without any protests probably because the Lutheran view of them as a category of members of a family almost at the bottom of the hierarchy was not challenged until much later in Finland. The father of a family was the main person, the mother was secondary [30].

In Finnish law, corporal punishment of children was not forbidden until 1984 [31]. The Biblical maxims '*Alla som jag älskar tillrättavisar och tuktar jag. Var därför ivrig och omvänd dig*' (As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent) and '*Ty den Herren älskar, den agar han, och han straffar med riset var son som han har kär*' (For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives) [32] are the background to a popular proverb in Finland: '*Den man älskar agar man*' (Who is beloved will also be chastised) [33], which certainly provides parents with excuses for being violent towards their children. Another explanation is the opinion that whatever happens in a family is private and should not be exposed outside it. Religion in this form of Christianity and converted into everyday life constitutes an explanation why children could be abused in silence and why such a deed was neglected.

4.2. Social Factors

Social factors also come into mind. Children were regarded as a gift from God. Consequently, until recently contraceptives were not accepted. The family was the centre in this social construction and the father was the authority [34]. Regarded from this point of view, the evangelist's wife was rather courageous when she requested the sauna visitors to watch her husband. It is impossible to tell why they did not react, but a reference to the view of forgiveness can explain

the situation and it is a good guess that they were afraid of the evangelist's reaction and the consequences for his wife. We might speak about misplaced respect.

The interviewee Anna said that she would have understood the abuse if the evangelist's wife had been cold, but she also said that the woman was a nice and warm person. Both the evangelist and his wife had listened to and helped Anna in difficult situations. Consequently, it may have been easy for Anna to feel solidarity with both [16]. Because the evangelist was a powerful person, obviously not only because of his position but also due to his character, his supporters defended him, gagging those who were critical [18]. Fear of consequences of the prevailing tendency to be silent probably underlined the need for solidarity with the paedophile.

The position of the father-evangelist is worth some attention. The mentality 'What the Old Man Does is Always Right' [35] was a hindrance for comments about a father's behaviour. According to Bert, a family was mentally circumscribed and whatever happened in it was not to be complained or gossiped about: '[...] everything should be embedded in the circle (family) but everything within the circle should be overt.' He told about a case in which, without any protests, a sister-in-law had sexual relations with her very young brother-in-law. To Bert it was clear that this closed family life was a good hotbed for peculiar behaviour [19]. Niggardliness and vapidness protected family secrets.

Fear of retaliation is yet another reason for being quiet. Appearances were important. Tom even spoke a lot of building a façade and Bert talked about families in which the children were strictly tied to, even smothered by their parents, especially the father. A wonderful, expensive house could exist only because a lot of children had been exploited to help to build it without asking for any salary but free board and lodging. This kind of liaison between a young person and the parents hindered the children's wish to oppose their parents. The father had the power to set back the children's dreams to reach some specific goal. Tiptoeing was the only way [18, 19].

Last, but not least, shame was also one of the factors that influenced people's behaviour. Sexuality was nothing to be discussed openly [17]. There was a mental conflict in standing between the 'rules' of the exceptional position of fathers, the right of families to be unquestioned and the feeling of something going on that was not correct. People kept quiet, they helped to victimise children whereas they shielded the perpetrator. He felt shame, as did the victims after they had grown up. Also, the interviewees felt shame. The evangelist asked publicly for forgiveness, the victims hid themselves until they were adult, and two of the interviewees, i.e., Anna and her husband James, euphemised the paedophile deeds. Moreover, the interviewees underlined that they could not believe what they heard about this highly respected person [16, 17, 18]. Anna did not even trust her own children when they talked about the paedophilia [16]. By contrast, her husband James said in the interview that he was not surprised. He had some suspicion that there was something wrong with the evangelist's relationship to

sexuality, for he had warned children in the grocery shop not to look at men's magazines. How could the evangelist know anything about them unless he had looked at them himself, James pondered? [17.] Tom was so ashamed after he had heard about the event on the radio that he wanted to meet nobody in the crew, rather he wanted to closet in his cabin on the ship on which he was employed [18]. Shame is difficult to bear. It is easier to hide and to shut one's mouth.

4.3. Pedagogical Factors

It is probably possible to understand the situation also from a pedagogical point of view. These children grew up in isolation and under an austere education. The interviewees [18, 19] repeatedly described what they had seen was allowed and what was not. According to them, these limitations were damaging because harshness might lead to a gag. They maintained that the parents said that they were protecting their children, but the interviewees defined this sheltering as a kind of isolation. They used words such as rigour, Biblical legalism and control. As an example, Bert talked about one of the victims who had been in the army, i.e., away from home and away from his parent's watchful eyes, and went to the cinema to watch a horror film. Asked about his opinion of the film he said that it was nothing compared to what he had experienced at home. Bert thought that, in this way, the children grew up to be submissive, and first and foremost, always to think about what father or mother might wish them to think or to do. The Bible was the norm, and it was interpreted in the strictest way. This certainly gave them a weak will of their own. It also gave them a kind of naïveté, foolishness and unwisdom so that they did not manage as independent persons. When the newspapers started to write about the event the victim that had exposed what happened had married a strong woman who perhaps had made him aware of his abnormal childhood [19].

Yet another fact probably plays a major role for why the children were neglected. Generally, children did not provoke reactions. There were so many of them, as a gift from God. He had created them the way they were and there was no reason to be proud of them, which meant that the glory belonged to God alone. In Swedish, there are a lot of proverbs to put children down, such as *'Barn ska man aga medan vidjan är mjuk'* (Children should be flogged when the rod is soft) ([36], or general proverbs such as *'Din vilja är i pappas ficka'* (Your will is in Dad's pocket) or *'Barn ska synas men inte höras'* (Children should be seen but not heard). The latter proverb mentions how children should not speak up. These expressions demonstrate that children did not have a value of their own, only as an appendix to their parents. According to the interviews the grandfather's paramount authority in combination with the ancillary position of the children allowed him to behave improperly and prevented them from loud protests. This was made possible through the ruling pedagogical ideal of the time, in the milieu, and in the evangelist's individual mind. This, however, is not clearly expressed by the interviewees.

4.4. The Cognisance Factor

However, the most important answer to why especially the victims said nothing was the fact that they were small children and could not decide whether their grandfather, i.e., the evangelist behaved normally or not. Bert told how children in a closed family were not allowed to visit friends, to participate in any clubs outside school or having any hobbies that would inform them of what life was like elsewhere. It was impossible for them to see that their grandfather was doing something ugly. Bert underlined that there was a lack of critical thinking, a lack of independent thinking without considerations about father or mother and their opinions or ways of leading their lives. Simply, the children could not find a reason for complaining about their grandfather's habits because they did not have any other experience [19, cf. 16].

4.5. Economic Factors

Economic matters offered a reason for silence. For their own benefit, the evangelist's supporters could not report him to the police. In the community he was a very influential person to whom loyalty was important. His supporters had also hushed members of the community [19].

We have seen that the evangelist's wife warned the sauna visitors about her husband. She was dependent on him because he earned the money needed to raise many children, to build a house, and to let the family lead a good life according to his wishes. If she had notified the police he would have been put into jail and the foundation of her life would have been undermined, not only mentally but also practically. Her expression 'Keep an eye on Daddy' is interpreted as a way to avoid such a situation while still trying to do something to shelter the children.

The evangelist's children were also economically dependent on their father. Partly they worked under him for a common goal that he had defined, partly they earned money outside the family. Bert told about one victim who was forced to give all his income to his father. When he grew up, he lost his teeth. Because he had given all his money to his family there was not enough left to go to the dentist's. He felt cheated and, moreover, he saw the missing teeth as evidence of not having received relevant and nutritious food as a child. He realised it only when he was an adult, and then it was too late to talk [19]. All in all, this analysis of the interviews points towards a situation in which the members of the community experienced co-dependency based on a falsely maintained respect expressed as empathy, fear and shame.

5. Silence as a Strategy for Harmony

Eva Österberg found seven applications for silence as a strategy to reach certain goals from the 14th century until today. They were the silences of the pious quest, uncertainty, pride, respect, shame, shyness and mysteriousness [37]. The interviewees attest to respect, shame, and shyness. The

Laestadian belief supports respect for the Bible as a model for life, and respect for an esteemed preacher and an elderly grandfather and husband. Shame was a distinct reason for silence. Shyness might explain the children's quiescence. However, there are more components in the strategy of silence.

Firstly, it is worthwhile regarding the conversation in the interviews. Two of the four interviewees never mentioned the word paedophilia, or derivations of it, nor any official synonyms. Instead, they circumscribed it using a dialect expression such as '*de ska på små barn*' (they will [pick] on small children), '*sån't där*' (things like that), or '*könsanstaltas*' (sexual doings) [16, 17]. Besides shame, for sexuality is a difficult topic, this meant that they took a step backwards from reality. Even then, they did not really believe what had happened. Alternatively, their education and age might prevent them from speaking about sexuality in an explicit way. Scepticism is one of the ways of concealing. Doubt does not convince anybody of the existence of paedophilia in the community. Circumscription was a strategy for silence.

Quite often the believers referred to excuses. This kind of defence concerned both them and the evangelist. They stated that it is human to err. Consequently, it was understandable that even an evangelist might make mistakes. It is possible to interpret this statement as a means to understand his 'needs', for nobody is always sinless [16].

Bert tried to explain his behaviour and said that he knew what had been going on, but he wanted to spare the victims until they took the initiative to speak. If they were startled by surprise there was a risk that they would be ashamed and remain silent, he believed. The same interviewee said that he had not realised what happened until the evangelist was dead, so who would he now report to the police? He also said that it is easier to hide a person's defects the more pious and able to quote Scripture the person is. The evangelist was known for his profound knowledge of the holy texts. By implication it became clear that the evangelist was such an expert that nobody dared criticise him. Scepticism, excuses, and deference can explain why informed members of the community did not react to help the abused children, not at the time when the abuse happened nor afterwards when the newspapers wrote about it. All of these are strategic actions [19].

Secondly, the level of the narrative must be regarded. The evangelist's wife was aware of her husband's peculiarity. Bert said that when she prepared her family for the sauna, she told those who participated to 'keep an eye on Daddy' [19]. Nobody seemed to react to it, and Tom argued that later people whitewashed the paedophile, saying that what the evangelist-grandfather had done was not so important because he had not touched inside the trousers of the children [18]. Anyway, Bert maintained that it was not important where the grandfather had 'been', the crucial point was his thoughts and his intentions [19].

Whitewashing and covering up were other strategic actions. Beside cowardliness, the strategies for keeping up

appearances, for saving the ostensible harmony in the community, were respect, shame and shyness, scepticism, deference and whitewashing.

6. Conclusion

In this overview of a couple of interviews, answers to the questions 'why?' and 'how?' concerning the neglect of paedophilia were central. There were several factors that can help to understand why a paedophile was never exposed although people in his town were informed of his behaviour. Probably fear, laziness, and cowardliness played a part in the reception of the paedophile's actions, but there were also other circumstances. Religion was one factor that enabled, and in a way, supported quiescence. Also, social factors contributed to this collective behaviour. Shame continued the concealment. The outlook on education was another important aspect. A lack of knowledge of sexuality and 'normal' sexual intercourse helped to hide what was going on. Also, economic factors played a role to maintain the silence. A daily lack of economic resources is bothersome.

Why were precisely these factors relevant? An answer to this question might help to see the way people avoided speaking about paedophilia but instead constructed the strategies needed to explain how people hid the evangelist's actions. They helped people to justify the evangelist. His religious expertise, his high social position and his rights as a 'good' father protected him. Here, the requirement that forgiveness abolishes all sins is an efficient asset. People were unwilling to talk about him for the Bible says: 'Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour' [38]. This commandment might make it impossible for believing members of the community to report about the evangelist to the police, especially regarding all the consequences such a report would lead to. Moreover, there is evidence of (false) care. Certainly, people did not want to harm the evangelist, but he was not the only one to defer to. The victims too might be wounded. Last, but not least, people were silent to save their own skin. In this way it is clear that there are a couple of structural factors that support silence. Co-dependency seems to be an explanation for silence. Taciturnity also becomes a shelter to maintain balance and harmony in the community. It prevents conflict, but it is falsely regarded as preserving peace and unity, which seems to be more important than justice.

Further investigations about paedophilia that are based on this kind of material might concern how men and women speak about sexual abuse of children, taking into consideration that most paedophiles are men. Another important issue might be a thorough study of how adolescent sexuality is experienced, constructed, and lived in a Laestadian society.

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