

The Makin Review on John Smyth QC, the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury and subsequent events.

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Introduction

On 7 November 2024, following a five-year investigation, the *"Independent Learning Lessons Review: John Smyth QC"* by Independent Reviewer, Keith Makin was published. The Report, including appendices is 498 pages long.¹

Smyth was a high-ranking barrister and at one time a Reader (lay leader) in the Church of England. He was at one time a leader of the conservative evangelical Iwerne camps. He was a serial abuser who was not stopped in his abuse.

Five days after publication of the Report, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby announced his resignation. His statement included:

"The Makin Review has exposed the long-maintained conspiracy of silence about the heinous abuses of John Smyth.

When I was informed in 2013 and told that police had been notified, I believed wrongly that an appropriate resolution would follow.

It is very clear that I must take personal and institutional responsibility for the long and retraumatising period between 2013 and 2024."²

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/independent-review-churchs-handling-smyth-case-published>

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/statements-resignation-archbishop-canterbury>

The major failings were in the 1980s when, in 1982, the Reverend Mark Ruston discovered the abuse of Smyth of boys / young men from the school Winchester College and the Christian Iwerne camps. Ruston wrote up the details in a report which were read by a small group led by the Revd David Fletcher who was a leader at the Iwerne camps alongside Smyth who was a leader and trustee of the camps. Smyth, Ruston and Fletcher have all died, though the Revd David Fletcher was interviewed by the Reviewers in 2020.

In the absence of any safeguarding guidance at the time. the small number who received the Ruston Report in 1982 decided not to report it to the police. They attempted to deal with it themselves to put a stop to Smyth's abuse and prevent it happening again:

"17.1.16 Attempts to manage John Smyth were 'informal' by means of written 'agreements' with him on at least two occasions. This Review demonstrates how wholly ineffective these were – there is clear evidence of his ignoring all agreements" Page 235.

In 1984 Smyth moved to Zimbabwe where he set up children's camps where he continued to abuse. In 2001 he moved to South Africa where there is some evidence of abuse there.

Between 1982 and 2013, knowledge of Smyth's previous abuse from 1982 became an 'open secret' to a wider number of people within the evangelical constituency (though the details were not widely known). During that period church safeguarding policies were starting to be introduced, but none of that wider group reported to the police the historic abuse.

In 2013 a disclosure was made to a Church of England Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor after which things started to slowly progress. The police were notified but did not investigate. It was only when the matter was exposed by Channel 4 News in 2017 did the police take action and proactively investigate, but before Smyth could be prosecuted for his crimes, he died.

The Report rightly provokes anger and sadness: sadness at the suffering of so many victims, and anger that the suffering could have been prevented.

The abuse

In the UK

Smyth sourced his victims by getting himself into a place of spiritual authority over boys / young men from the Winchester College Christian Forum, or University Christian Union or the Iwerne camps:

"6.3.13 Evidence considered in this Review suggests that 16 Winchester College students were physically abused, with a further six to eight who were groomed. A further nine victims were abused who had attended eight other public schools prior to the abuse occurring – we strongly suspect that the true figure is probably greater, hence the probable total of victims from this period being in the order of 26 to 30 victims who were abused by John Smyth in the UK. Of these, at least five were recruited by John Smyth directly from universities, with no pre-existing connection to, or attendance, at Iwerne camps. Approximately 60% of those known to have been abused went to Cambridge University, with the rest attending six other universities.

John Smyth actively travelled to and recruited at these universities, mainly via the Christian Unions there, being invited to talk." Page 20.

Smyth justified his beatings to the young men on the basis that it was helping strengthen their discipline in the Christian faith.

The severity of the beatings is set out in the 1982 Report from the Reverend Mark Ruston who was a chaplain at Winchester College and uncovered the abuse.

"The Ruston Report, viewed by several people in 1982, states:

"The scale and severity of the practice was horrific. Five of the 13 I have seen were in it only for a short time. Between them they had 12 beatings and about 650 strokes. The other 8 received about 14,000 strokes: 2 of them having some 8,000 strokes over the three years. The others were involved for one year of 18 months. 8 spoke of bleeding on most occasions ("I could feel the blood splattering on my legs" – "I was bleeding for 3½ weeks" "I fainted sometime after a severe beating"). I have seen bruised and scored buttocks, some two-and-a-half months after the beating. Beatings of 100 strokes for masturbation, 400 for pride, and one of 800 strokes for some undisclosed "fall" are recorded." " Paragraph 6.3.2. Page 17.

The Ruston Report identified that the beatings were a breach of the criminal law:

"Technically all offences under the Offences Against The Person Act of 1861, Sec. 47". Paragraph 6.3.4. Page 18.

One victim attempted to take their own life. Their account of what happened is deeply moving:

"Very shortly after enduring that beating John Smyth told me that my next one, which was going to mark my 21st birthday, was going to be special and more severe than those I'd suffered before. I thought this meant I was going to be getting two of three hundred strokes as I was aware by then that one of the other victims had been beaten with 400 strokes. I also knew that another victim had received an all-day beating of 800 strokes.

[...] I came up with a plan to escape the beatings.

I thought of sending two letters signed by a fictitious person. I wrote the letters between my birthday and the date of the beating which I think was in early February 1982. I wrote one letter to John Smyth at Orchard House and one to David Fletcher who I saw as the managing director of the Iwerne Minster Christian camps. I hadn't been to the camps for a number of years but I thought that if anyone could exert any control over John Smyth it would be David Fletcher. I wrote a very cursory letter to both of them saying that I had become aware that John Smyth had been beating young men and that if it didn't stop immediately the police and media would be told. I honestly thought that the threat of exposure would prevent John Smyth from beating me again and hoped that as soon as David Fletcher read the letter it would put an end to everything. I left it for about two days but was quite surprised that no friends or John himself hadn't got in touch with me to say that something was happening as a result of the letters being received.

I then rang John Smyth the night before I was due to travel down for the special beating and had my usual conversation about train times. I realised that my plan had not worked and I felt I was staring into an abyss which brought a certainty with it in a way in that I knew that I just couldn't go ahead with the beating, so I decided that I was going to kill myself.

[...] I went to the toilet, locked myself in and cut my wrists. I can't remember if my flat mates had returned or I waited for them to come back before I did anything, because I think there was part of me that wanted to survive. I then swallowed the bottles of pills but either in swallowing the second bottle or after I put it down on the sink, it fell on the floor and a friend who was passing asked if I was alright. I don't remember saying anything but they must have sensed that something was wrong because they smashed the door down and called an ambulance. The next thing I remember was being in Norwich hospital and having my stomach pumped." Paragraph 12.1.15. Page 74.

In Zimbabwe

"16.28 Some attempts were made to warn people of the dangers posed by John Smyth before his departure to Zimbabwe and whilst he was living there. These attempts were informal, weak and ineffective, and seriously undermined by the fact that they were made within the context of an overall cover-up of the abuses in the UK. Despite warnings, he went on to establish a Mission and to set up camps for boys. He then abused boys in his care. Several attempts were made to stop him, including the dramatic decision of the entire UK Board of the Zambesi Trust to stand down in 1989, based on their concerns about John Smyth's use of physical punishment and nudity. Funding and support for him and his camps continued, both from the UK and from the Zambesi Trust in Canada." Page 227.

"6.3.14 [...] The number of victims in Africa is estimated at around 85 to 100 male children aged 13 to 17." Page 20.

"16.32 [...] Senator David Coltart thoroughly investigated John Smyth's abuses, with a total of 14 affidavits from those John Smyth abused being drawn up for presentation to the court, in a separate prosecution. People in the UK, including Church officers, were very aware of these attempts at bringing John Smyth to justice in Zimbabwe. At any point in this period, any one of those people could and should have taken the initiative to report John Smyth to the police for his abuses in the UK." Page 228.

Why was the abuse covered up?

In 1982 there were no safeguarding guidelines for schools or churches. Those who read Ruston's Report tried to deal with Smyth themselves and prevent it happening again. They do not seem to have given serious thought to reporting it to the police.

"(d) The evidence from the time, which includes a great deal of contemporaneous correspondence between the people shown the Ruston Report, shows, clearly, that there were several possible reasons for the non-disclosure:

- (i) To protect the reputation of the Iwerne movement.
- (ii) To protect the wider reputation of Conservative Evangelicalism.

- (iii) To protect the reputations of the individuals involved with Iwerne.
- (iv) To protect the reputations of the victims' parents.

[...] (f) A claim is made that the parents of the victims were consulted, and they agreed to this non-disclosure. The truth is that only three sets (possibly four) of parents were consulted, with one of these favouring disclosure to the authorities.

(g) There is no attempt to consult with the victims as to their views on this. It is worth noting here that the victims were treated as "boys" and are referred to as such. The emphasis throughout is firmly on considering the wishes of the victims' parents. These were, by this point not "boys" but adult men, who were not given agency in this whole process." Paragraph 12.1.10. Page 62."

"a decision was made to not report a suspected crime to the police and this should have been done, whatever the views of parents." Paragraph 12.1.49. Page 84.

Appendix 22 is the report by James Stileman, Operations Director to Trustees of the Titus Trust of 22 July 2014 of his research into "the John Smyth affair". In relation to why the abuse of the boys from Winchester College was not reported to the police in 1982, he writes:

"The parents of the victims were top names in the country. (It was as much for their protection as for the protection of the victims that events were not disclosed to the authorities.)" Page 7 of Appendix 22.

The idea that not reporting to police was a kindness to 'protect the victims' - whether it be the victims themselves, or their parents or the reputation of the organisation, seems to have been taken for granted.

To me it is illogical. If the boys had been attacked in the street by a stranger, those who discovered the boy bleeding would have called the police and sought to have the attacker prosecuted. They would not say to themselves "I better not ring the police because I want to protect the victim". It should be no different when the attacker is from within organisation. Not reporting the criminal only protects the criminal.

Regarding the motivation to not report so as to protect the reputation of the Iwerne camps and the evangelical movement:

"(e) In an interview with us, David Fletcher said: "I thought it would do the work of God immense damage if this were public." Page 62, paragraph 12.1.10.

Appendix 8 is a letter from Revd David Fletcher to Revd Mark Ruston of 22 March 1982 he reports on the meeting he had with Smyth where he had told him that Smyth was to no longer work with children and must seek psychological help. Fletcher thinks that if they can guarantee that the abuse is not repeated, they will keep the abuse confidential. He writes that when he gave Smyth the conditions, Smyth:

"was fully ready to accept he was to leave camp work but he has not committed himself to abide by any of the points. [...] I did not make the points conditions for our silence. I preferred to appeal to his promise to go the second and third mile. I wonder whether referring the matter to the S.U. [Scripture Union] council could be the next

steps we take if he does not agree to our points. This would save having to tell parents, housemasters: it would keep it within Christian circles: it would reach one or two legal men whom I guess John is anxious that they should not know."

David Fletcher thought that if Smyth gave his word as a gentleman to abide by the conditions, he would obey them and there would be no future abuses. Then the previous abuse could be kept within "Christian circles", so as not to damage the reputation of Christianity to non-Christians.

The Iwerne camps were conservative evangelical, with a strong emphasis that we are all miserable sinners, only saved by the underserved mercy of God through Jesus' death and resurrection. So why should Fletcher think it necessary to cover up the fact of Smyth's sins?

The Iwerne camps were a great vehicle for boys to learn about Jesus and become Christians. If parents found out that one of the main leaders had been abusing boys (although the abuse was done in his garden shed rather than at the camps), parents might stop sending their children to the camps and the Christian message would not be heard.

Of course, the decision to cover-up made things far worse. When the matter eventually came to light and it was discovered that the coverup had allowed further abuses to take place, the reputational damage was far greater.

As time went on more people learned of the abuse, but it was still not reported to the authorities:

"Safeguarding policies and procedures that gave a framework for reporting by Church officials were not in place within the Church of England until 1995. However, as time goes on, with new policies and procedures coming into force, this becomes less valid as a reason for lack of action." Paragraph 13.1.1. Page 121.

"David Fletcher had shared the Ruston Report with people in Zimbabwe in the 1990s in an attempt at alerting authorities there about the danger that John Smyth posed. As this Review has shown, very many people knew of the abuses in the UK by the time of the Titus Trust being alerted by an anonymous person. It was a quite "open secret" amongst a whole variety of people connected with the Conservative Evangelical network, both in the UK and in Africa and by both Clergy and Lay people. The core argument that the victims were being protected by not sharing the knowledge of the 1982 Ruston Report is, by now, spurious. In fact, the "secret" had been "out" for a long time. David Fletcher was still attempting to protect the Iwerne reputation, the Conservative Evangelical world, as well as his own reputation and that of the small group who did not report or act adequately on knowledge of the abuse. " Paragraph 14.1.1. Page 171.

Smyth's misuse of the Bible to his victims

"21.1 John Smyth was able to radicalise his victims, by using his misinterpretation and misuse of the Scriptures. He taught, preached, and exploited children and young people by applying a false theology, based on selected Scriptures, taken out of context. He mis-used the writings and views of various conservative theologians, primarily from the United States, including AW Tozer, Billy Graham, SD Gordon and

Jim Packer. He contended that the way to Christ was through suffering, and he offered a "programme" which included ensuring that suffering was a route to the atonement of sins." Page 242.

A victim described how Smyth misused scripture to groom the boys into receiving beatings from him:

"We looked at this passage together from Hebrews Chapter 12 which was all about how God is a father and how all fathers discipline their children. No child likes the discipline at the time but afterwards it reaps a reward in terms of good behaviour. It was at this point that he started to talk about the beatings. He said, 'A father will chastise his child and in the Bible it says, 'Do not spare the rod'. 'So, he brought in this metaphor of the rod, only it wasn't a metaphor because he meant it literally. He said 'And I don't believe that I should spare the rod with you either....'

[...] "Then after supper, let's go and have a chat, and this was all "firesidey", let's look at some verses from the Bible about how the Lord disciplines those he loves, you haven't yet resisted sin to the point of shedding your blood, from the Letter to the Hebrews. When you stop to think about it, that is so terribly twisted out of context, because that was written to Christians who had been persecuted like people in North Korea now, that kind of thing, but, of course, he had another agenda with that." " Paragraph 11.3.12. Page 45.

"John Smyth then began to instil in us the principle that these sins had to be marked in a way that would mean we were repenting before God. According to John Smyth it wasn't enough to keep saying sorry for sinning then keep on repeating that sin but if it was marked in some way, then we were more likely to stop sinning in the first place and that God would think we were really repentant." Paragraph 11.3.36. Page 49.

"I have often asked myself the question why did I go back, why did I allow myself to be beaten and the answer is that I thought Smyth was my spiritual mentor." Paragraph 11.3.46. Page 52.

Revd Mark Ruston in his 1982 Report wrote:

"7. By design or by circumstances, the system seems to have 'conned' men into accepting the bearings. There was a first talk on wholeheartedness with great emphasis on naming sins and making a list of one's personal failings, a second talk on Sex adding to the pressure, and then one or two personal talks when for the first time it was suggested that the list should be shared. Then there would be mention of the 'blessing' to be had through this system and a fair amount of pressure ("You want to be the best, don't you? Let me be a helper to you..." _)

[...] 11. Scripture used commonly were: Hebrews xii.5-11, 2 Samuel vii.13, St Luke xii,47, and many 'spare the rod' and 'fathers and sons' verses in Proverbs. But none would have suggested the practice to anyone not already emotionally committed (cf. the hold the cults have), the fathers and child verses do not apply (they were neither sons nor children). [...] All Christian leaders would condemn the practice." Paragraph 12.1.23. Page 78.

Looking at the verses Smyth misused:

Hebrews 12: 3-4:

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

That is saying that Jesus was crucified for us, he took our sins on himself. It is not saying that Smyth can beat people till they bleed in his garden shed.

Hebrews 12: 5-11 speaks of God disciplining us, his children. Spiritual discipline from God is not justification for a man beating up boys.

2 Samuel 7: 13-15:

"He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him."

This is referring to King David who will build a temple for God in Jerusalem, that when David disobeys God, other armies will attack Jerusalem, but God will continue to love David. It is not justification for a man beating up boys.

Luke 12:47:

"And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating."

Jesus is telling a parable about a slave who beats other slaves, how the slave master will then beat that slave. It is an illustration taken from the world to make a spiritual point. It is not saying that Smyth is the master and the boys are his slaves who he is allowed to beat.

Smyth's manipulation techniques and misuse of the Bible to those trying to control him

When Smyth was challenged with evidence about his abuse, he would minimise it, or agree to stop but then would not stop. For example, in 1982, Smyth signed an agreement that Revd David Fletcher and others had drawn up for him:

"There is a very weak attempt at curtailing John Smyth's activities. He openly flouted the several conditions laid on him, continued to preach as a Lay Preacher, continued to see the young men he had agreed to not see and continued to challenge people in an aggressive and manipulative way." Paragraph 12.1.10.j. Page 62.

He used different techniques control the process to stop his activities being reported to the police. He was a senior barrister and he used that authority to tell the clergy who had discovered his abuse that they were legally required to maintain confidentiality. In 1982 the the Revd John Edison wrote to the Revd David Fletcher regarding Smyth:

"he said that we clergy are bound by the law of secrecy and have a duty not to divulge to anyone else, even the police, what has been told us in confidence. If he is right, and he seems very sure of himself here, it does mean we would be covered, and that our silence is obligatory. Would you know about this?" Paragraph 12.1.43. Page 83.

Smyth would openly lie. For example, when forced to resign as Chair of the Trustees of the Iwerne Trust in 1982, his letter of resignation gave pressure of work as the reason (paragraph 12.1.67. Page 89).

"12.1.68 He also stood down from the Romans in Britain trial, which he has been working on as Mary Whitehouse's barrister since mid-1981. The reason given in court for his withdrawal from the trial is that he had been diagnosed by a doctor as having a "viral infection". Contemporaneous notes in relation to this event show that he did consult a doctor but this explanation to the court was fabricated." (Page 89)

Appendices 7 and 8 includes letters to and from Smyth in 1982. They show how he sought to manipulate the small group that included Revd David Fletcher and Revd Mark Ruston, who were trying to put restrictions on him.

For example, he tried a 'divide and rule' technique by trying to say that different people had said different things:

"I feel it was wrong and has done considerable harm to tell everybody (including some who no nothing of this matter) that I will not be at camp in the summer. [...] David [...] said he had come to no final decision [...] you acted unilaterally without consulting him."

He tries to plant seeds of doubt in their minds by saying that others disagree with their actions:

"I am told that senior officers in the know at Cambridge think your judgment has been at fault."

He quotes the Bible to imply that he doesn't personally want to criticise their actions, he is only doing so because the Bible tells him to:

"I hope I have done my duty according to Mt. 18"

Matthew chapter 18 verse 15 is "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." Smyth is implying that their actions against him are wrong and he is only reluctantly pointing it out.

He tries to keep them on side by saying sorry - but his apology is not for the abuse, but for the trouble caused to those who are seeking to put restrictions on him:

"I would like to say sorry once again for all the heart-ache I have caused you."

In a letter from Smyth to Revd David Fletcher. He minimises his actions, by arguing that his abuse of the boys was not due to sadistic urges to beat boys, it was simply a misguided

"spiritual venture" he and the boys went on together as equals, seeking to purge sin by physical discipline:

"You must get across that this was a spiritual venture demanding great faith, and not a physical obsession."

Smyth argues that in the same way that Moses did something wrong though spiritually motivated, his own motives were also pure:

"Moses is commended for his great faith in turning his back on the riches of Egypt but the very first thing he did after that was something terribly wrong. Great faith can be totally misguided. [...] at every stage [...] the whole venture was the subject of persistent prayer"

He further minimises the abuse by arguing that some good has come out of it:

"There can be no doubt that God has mightily blessed these men in spite of the sinful method used."

He quotes the Bible to say that he is on their side:

"We are rejoicing in Hebrews 10 vv 17-25. I shall go on praying like billy-oh for these men and for camp"

Hebrews 10: 17 is "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." So, just as God forgives repentant sinners, Smyth implies that they should forgive and forget his sins and allow him to continue working with children.

Another technique is for Smyth to go on the attack and say that they don't have authority over him due to their actions. The letter from Revd David Fletcher to Revd Mark Ruston on 22 March 1982 reporting on the restrictions they had decided to place on Smyth to stop him abusing again. Fletcher writes that Smyth:

"He said he no longer believed I cared for him, that Iwerne lacked "love" and that he could no longer place himself under my spiritual leadership."

Another letter he writes in the name of his wife, himself and one of his victims, he says he didn't own up to the abuse when he was first challenged about it because he wanted to protect the victims. He writes in the third person:

"When David first challenged him, he did not deny it, but simply made no admissions on the grounds of confidentiality"

He argues what he did was through good motives to obey the Bible, it is just he misinterpreted the Bible. He uses "we" to imply that his victims were willing participants rather than boys he had manipulated using his senior authority:

"everything we did we endeavoured to do according to scripture [...] wanting to demonstrate to Jesus so tangibly how much we wanted to obey Romans 12.1, how

much we wanted to share His holiness (Heb.12.10) how much we wanted to be bold and tough and yet really loving"

Romans 12 verse 1 is "...present your bodies as a living sacrifice..." The meaning of that verse is that we should do God's will. It does not mean that Smyth should coerce people to be naked and beat them. Hebrews 12 verse 10 is "...he disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness". That means that God disciplines us, it does not mean that Smyth is allowed to beat people.

Smyth knows that Revd David Fletcher won't be fooled into accepting Smyth's interpretation, Smyth is only trying to get Fletcher to believe that Smyth believed it at the time and he and the boys have now spotted their error:

"We see now that the method was entirely wrong, but we have no doubt that because our motives were entirely right God blessed in spite of it, if not through it."

He writes that Revd David Fletcher is under a Christian duty to forgive him. Writing in the third person:

"We have no doubt that the first sanctions letter of 25/3 was wrong in that you treated John as an unrepentant sinner according to Mt.18.17 and 1 Cor.5.11 instead of according to 2 Cor.2.5-11."

2 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 6 and 7 says regarding a repentant sinner "...you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him..."

"you wanted to impose a 'total exclusion zone' round John and Anne. Even in O.T. [Old Testament] terms (see for example Num.15.22-31) you treated this as a case of deliberate rather than unintentional sin."

Numbers chapter 15 verse 28 is, "And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven." Of course, whilst God forgives the sins of a repentant sinner, that does not mean, you should not report lawbreakers to the police and should not protect young people.

Smyth gets supporters to write letters to Revd David Fletcher on his behalf, to put pressure on Fletcher to remove the restrictions on Smyth. Appendix 10 has a letter from Peter Krakenberger, who was a teacher at Winchester College and one of the Iwerne camp leaders. He writes to Fletcher that Fletcher is at fault for not fully forgiving Smyth:

"John considers to be essential if you and he are to be reconciled is that you should apologise for these things in the past [...] I can see that John has a point - while you are suffering from an unforgiving spirit"

Mr Jamie Coleman, who was strongly influenced by Smyth and supported Smyth during his activities in Zimbabwe, resisted the attempts of Revd Mark Ashton, Revd David Fletcher and others to get Smyth's camps for boys shut down. Mr Coleman wrote to Mark Ashton in 1990:

"once fallen in a particular fashion are you thereafter disqualified until the very end of the game? Since the scriptural answer is 'no', then agreement on the criterion to permit reentry is necessary" Paragraph 13.1.59. Page 155.

This is another example of the misapplication of scripture. Yes, God forgives our sins when we are sorry and repent and turn from our wrong ways. That does not mean that, for example, an alcoholic who has asked for forgiveness should be put in charge of a brewery.

Conservative evangelicalism and the Iwerne camps

Appendix 4 is the psychological analysis of Smyth by clinical psychologist Dr Elly Hanson:

"It appears that he had Narcissistic Personality Disorder (grandiose type) and, related to this, little interest in relational connection; little ability or willingness to self-reflect; a focus on his self-interest above those of others; and little or no empathy. He displayed exhibitionist and voyeuristic tendencies; callousness; and an ability to charm (a magnetism). It also appears that he had a sexual interest in boys and young man (not incompatible with a sexual interest in his wife)."

Dr Hanson considers that the conservative evangelical theology, mixed with the elitism of the Iwerne camps that focussed on shaping boys as future leaders, was a grounding that Smyth could use to commit his abuse:

"the conservative evangelical community also appeared to adopt a 'them and us' mentality, it's belief system focussed on those who are saved and accepted by God (themselves) versus those who have rejected God and so live under his wrath (nearly everyone else). This majority were seen as a threat, motivated to undermine the community. Groups such as this may be particularly vulnerable to the charms and combative leadership of a grandiose narcissist [...]"

this community held beliefs that complemented Smyth's narcissism and afforded the perfect setting for him to gain the high social status that he believed he was due. A synergistic dynamic appears to have developed, in which the movement revered him, serving his narcissistic desires, and in parallel, it enjoyed the 'reflected glory' from his societal status as a successful QC. As an individual's power and status within a group increases, so too can a tendency towards 'wilful blindness': to overlook 'red flags' and minimise the person's wrongdoings. This occurs for several reasons: people are (even half-consciously) loathe to lose the advantages that the individual's status affords the group; they are concerned about the reputational damage this wrongdoing, if truly faced, could lead to; and furthermore, they have been taken in by the individuals' projected version of themselves. And so, as a result of all of these factors, their 'schema' (assumptions or working model) of them simply does not allow for this conflicting information.

This is made all the worse when the narcissist has successfully aligned themselves (in the eyes of themselves and others) with God. When he is seen as a leader chosen by God, 'gifted in ministry' and the like, his nefarious motivations and behaviour are even harder for others to countenance – misgivings and concerns feel like a disloyalty to God, and indeed Smyth explicitly narrated them as such. Furthermore, fears about

loss of reputation are compounded by the concern that people will lose their faith and fewer will be drawn to it."

In Appendix 5, Prebendary John Woolmer, who had led the Christian Forum at Winchester College, and had attended Iwerne camps, writes his reflections of what Iwerne was like at that time:

"I found the summer camps (I think there were 3 on consecutive weeks) both encouraging and disturbing. The boys (c 100?) had a lot of fun and were well looked after by the officers who were mainly undergraduates or young schoolmasters. There were plenty of interesting expeditions. In the evening, there were talks given on a very set pattern by accomplished speakers. The authority of the Bible, the substitutionary atonement, the need for commitment to Christ, featured prominently. [...] There were daily meetings for officers dominated by David Fletcher and John Smyth who sat on large chairs facing the rest of us. [...] If people raised awkward points the standard put down was 'Thank you for that'. It was pretty obvious that some of the officers were 'in' and others more on the fringe. I didn't realise that JS was upfront because he was chairman of the Iwerne Trustees. The theology was Conservative Evangelical. Women, who helped in the kitchen, I think, were firmly in the background. 'Keen' men (ie those who towed the party line) were encouraged to become Anglican clergy or Public Schoolmasters. There was a very strong 'shepherding' system. When boys left school, if they went to Oxford/Cambridge they were firmly steered towards St Ebbe's Oxford / the Round Church Cambridge. [...]

Why was I disturbed? (1) There was huge sense of possessiveness. The C of E was just a useful vehicle for influencing a wider circle of potential converts. School chaplains were to be tolerated (I was told that the officer's prayer meeting was moved discreetly away to a side room if 'unsound' chaplains were visiting. I evidently (just) passed muster). [...] (3) There was no openness to other points of view. [...]

On the other hand, Iwerne gave friendship and support to boys whose faith was often under fire in a hostile public school environment. They also led many people to a clear commitment."

Why was Smyth not prosecuted when the abuse became more widely known?

The terms of reference of the Review was for Makin to focus on the failings of the Church of England. However, the police also failed.

1993 No action taken by the police when the Coltart Report was published

The Ruston Report was provided to David Coltart a lawyer (now a Senator) in Zimbabwe who investigated Smyth's abuses in Zimbabwe. Coltart (whose biography I have reviewed³) did an excellent job gathering all the evidence:

"13.1.75 David Coltart became very heavily involved and carried out extensive investigations which culminated in a report known as 'The Coltart Report', which was

³ <https://adrianvincent.org.uk/the-struggle-continues-50-years-of-tyranny-in-zimbabwe/>

published in October 1993. [...] The Coltart Report describes the practices at the camps run by John Smyth and indicates serious levels of abuse against boys, mainly aged 13 to 16 years old.

13.1.76 They include:

- (a) Regular beatings with a table tennis bat (and sometimes a larger bat – a “Jokari”)
- [...] (c) John Smyth being naked and taking naked showers with boys;
- (d) Enforced “skinny dipping” which included a naked parade from the dormitories to the pool;
- (e) Boys being banned from wearing underwear; and
- (f) John Smyth sleeping in dormitories with the boys, whilst other staff (including Anne Smyth) slept in separate quarters." Page 158.

"13.1.174 Despite all this knowledge and despite there being active and strong correspondence between the people who knew of John Smyth's abuses, both in the UK and Zimbabwe, no one considered taking the matter to the UK police." Page 170.

2003 No report made to the police by the Lawyers Christian Fellowship

"13.1.118 John Smyth wrote to Mark Mullins of the Lawyers Christian Fellowship in the UK in January 2003 (Appendix 17), introducing himself and saying that he had been out of the country for nearly 20 years. It is not clear why he wrote in this way. Mark Mullins was alerted to allegations about John Smyth and reacted by speaking with Reverend Brian Anderson, pastor at a Baptist Church in Cape Town."

"13.1.120 In May, the information about John Smyth was placed before the LCF National Committee [...] Mark Mullins' statement to the LCF said "...he is not a fit person to be a member of the LCF in the absence of any true repentance from these activities" (Appendix 18). It can be argued that the LCF could have done more to expose John Smyth to the UK authorities. Equally, it can be argued that the LCF took decisive action and attempted to curtail John Smyth's activities in South Africa. It is out of the scope of the ToR for this Review to make a judgement on that." Pages 165-166.

Appendix 18 shows the good research that Mr Mullins had undertaken, revealing Smyth's crimes in his 24 June 2003 paper to the Lawyers Christian Fellowship. He had obtained a copy of the Ruston Report and was able to be specific about the severity of the abuse:

"5. This report stated that Mr Smyth would give beatings of 100 strokes for masturbation, 400 for pride and one of 800 strokes for some undisclosed fall. Although these beating began with the victim semi naked the custom gave way to complete nakedness to "increase humility". For training beatings a man undressed himself, for "falls" he submitted to being undressed by the operator."

"7. John Smyth gave a signed undertaking to the headmaster of Winchester College not to engage in further work with young men and also agreed to leave the United Kingdom which he did in 1984 when he went to Zimbabwe. In return he was not prosecuted for his activities."

Mr Mullins writing, "in return he was not prosecuted for his activities" is ambiguous as to whether those crimes had been reported to police in 1982. It is disappointing that a readership of trained lawyers did not appear to have thought whether to check whether the crime had been reported to the police, and if it had not, to make a report themselves. Solicitors and barristers have a duty to maintain the confidentiality of their lay client's affairs in most cases. However, Smyth was not their client, they had no duty of confidentiality towards him at all.

"The Review has highlighted a pattern of believing that *someone else* had taken responsibility for *doing something* about John Smyth as an abuser in the UK and then again in Africa. There is a need for the Church to fully embrace and implement and monitor the application of the mantra that "Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility/business". Paragraph 17.1.17. Page 235.

2013-2016 No police investigation when it was reported to them

In 2012 Mrs Anne Atkins had referred to knowing the existence of an abuser in an article in the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper. In a letter to the *Church Times* newspaper of 29 November 2024, Mrs Atkins states that the Smyth's name was given to the police at that time:

"our daughter walked into a police station after I blew the whistle on Smyth (*Mail on Sunday*, 2012) with my article in her hand and tried to give them his identity. The police were not interested. They refused even to log it."

When reports were first made to police in 2013, the police were not at that time provided with the Rushton Report or the names of victims, so they were unaware of the seriousness of the abuse and were not given contacts to obtain direct testimony.

"14.3.19 A telephone call took place between Yvonne Quirk the Bishop of Ely's Safeguarding Adviser, and DS Lisa Pearson of Cambridgeshire Police in July 2013. DS Lisa Pearson, who went on to become a DSA in Ely, described to reviewers that she considered the phone call with the Safeguarding Adviser to be solely about giving advice, and that she did not consider this to be a formal referral to the Police. Consequently, no crime report was completed. Yvonne Quirk has advised reviewers she expected that any safeguarding conversations were contemporaneously logged and kept as intelligence in case of further developments." Page 186.

14.3.23 Yvonne Quirk later met in person with two of Lisa Pearson's more senior police colleagues at a Police station in Cambridge. [...] "*I was told that, regretfully, this case could not be taken any further as a police matter.*" Yvonne's recollection of this meetings and the reasons given for this are:

- "*The victims had capacity and it could be argued they consented to what happened;*
- *The threshold for vitiating consent was an injury that resulted in blood being spilled; there was nothing to indicate serious injury at the time of the meeting;*
- *Neither man was likely to meet the definition of Vulnerable Adult under legislation or policy;*
- *There were issues around being 'out of time' for assault*

- *There was little or no chance of extraditing JS from South Africa.*" Page 186.

"14.3.69 A total of five police forces were told of the abuse between 2013 and the end of 2016" Page 194.

A controversial part of the Report is that Makin states that the matter was not formally reported to the police:

"14.3.27 There was never a formal referral to Cambridgeshire Police, although a police intelligence report was subsequently sent to Hampshire police where the offences were thought to have occurred." Page 187.

"14.3.32 The Archbishop of Canterbury was ill-advised about the actions taken in the Ely diocese. He was told that a referral had been made to the police. This was not correct."

I think that these last two quotes are an unfair playing with words which could mislead readers into thinking that the Church had failed to report the matter to the police. The Church Safeguarding Advisor had made a telephone report to the police and then had a meeting with two senior police officers to discuss it. The fact that the police failed to log it with a crime reference number does not mean that the Church didn't report it to the police.

There were also reports made to the police by the Titus Trust (a body which was created after Iwerne had closed down):

"14.3.51 The abuses that are known about by the [Titus] Trust since at least June 2014 were then relayed to Hampshire Police by James Stileman [Operations Director of Titus Trust] on 26th September 2014. James Stileman was subsequently visited at home by the Metropolitan Police. He offered them the report (the Stileman Report as it became known). He reports that the police asked to be sent the report with the victim's names redacted. The Met police recorded a crime and James Stileman was given a crime reference number. Most likely with the intention that this would be handed to the victims, presumably so that they could contact the police, giving their names and details. This was recorded as a third party allegation. James Stileman gave the crime reference number to Yvonne Quirk, but there is no record of this being given to either of the victims she was in contact with.

[...] 14.3.53 Victims have said to reviewers that this was a critical and important missed opportunity. If they had been clear that an investigation may have been started, triggered by them reporting the crime, they would have taken that opportunity to speak with police." Page 191.

"29th March 2015 James Stileman has a phone call with Hampshire Police following several attempts via email and phone in February. [...] Police advised that they had assessed the risk of John Smyth being able to perpetrate abuse in South Africa and case was to close but victims could come forward if they wished." Page 180.

Titus Trust knew of two names but didn't give them to the police:

"The two victims known to most trustees and James Stileman at this time were not consulted on whether they would agree to their names being forwarded to the police, and so this was done without their identities being revealed. The police referral was, therefore, inadequate and ended due in part to there being no named abuse victim." Paragraph 14.1.1. Page 171.

In November 2016, the Revd David MacInnes - thirty years later than he should have done - provided a copy of the Ruston Report to the Oxford Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, who passed it on to the police.

"16th November 2016 Specialist DS from Thames Valley Police was able to speak to the original referrer, David MacInnes, and he provided a few additional details, [...] The DS ensured that an offence of "Section 18 Grievous Bodily Harm wounding with intent (Offences Against the Person Act 1861)" was recorded in light of the nature of the injuries described and advised the original reporter that, in the absence of additional information, it was likely that the report would be filed given the lack of any obvious lines of enquiry."

Of course, "obvious lines of enquiry" were for the police to seek out the victims by making enquiries of Winchester School and Iwerne of their records to contact those from that time and ask whether any had been victims. But this would have involved a lot of police resource. It was only when the matter became a news item that they put in the resource.

2017-2018: The police take action after the Channel 4 News item, but drop the case on Smyth's death

The Channel 4 News item in 2017 prompted the police to investigate, which was four years after the reports they had received:

"15.1.7 The day before the airing of the programme, Hampshire Police issued a press statement, announcing a police investigation (later called Operation Cubic) and inviting victims to contact them, making direct approaches to victims that they were made aware of to participate in the investigation." Page 205.

The police gathered evidence and then:

"had handed their file to the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] and had sufficient evidence to formally question John Smyth. They had contacted his legal representative who agreed that John Smyth would return to the UK voluntarily to face questions. Police intended to extradite him if he was not prepared to be questioned voluntarily, but it seemed this was not required. The investigation had since been filed following receipt of his death certificate and victims had been notified of this." Paragraph 14.3.71. Page 219.

The criticism of Archbishop Justin Welby

The Report makes several criticisms of Archbishop Welby. Most of them seem to me to be unfair.

Criticism that he didn't get personally involved to push the investigation forward

When the abuse was reported to Archbishop Welby in 2013, he replied that it should be reported to the police if it had not already been. He was told it had been reported to the police. The Review appears to criticise him for not checking the accuracy of what he was told:

"14.3.10 Justin Welby wrote or stated in an email from that time that he knew John Smyth in the 1970s and states that the matter is "*disclosable and must be done by either us or them*", the "them" being the Iwerne/Titus Trust. He was advised by Jo Bailey Wells that [...] the matter was being investigated by the Police [...] and a letter has been sent to the appropriate Bishop in Cape Town. It is not clear what the reference to the matter being "disclosable" means. If it refers to the need for a disclosure to authorities (the Police) needing to be made, this was not fully followed up." Page 184.

Archbishop Welby was told that the Bishop of Cape Town, where Smyth was now living, had been warned about having an abuser living there. The Review criticises the Archbishop for not personally following this up:

"16.13 [...] it would reasonably have been expected for him to take a more personal interest and to have followed this matter up, certainly to the extent of reassuring himself that the letter to Cape Town had been properly replied to and that actions were, indeed, being taken to ensure that John Smyth could not be continuing to abuse there. Furthermore, he could and should have reinforced the message to the Church in Cape Town via his friendship with Thabo Makoba.

16.14 Our opinion, therefore, is that Justin Welby held a personal and moral responsibility to pursue this further, whatever the policies at play at the time required. He was advised to not pursue this further whilst a police investigation was underway (which it wasn't) but he should have made further attempts to reassure himself that the matter was being pursued, particularly with regard to the approach to South Africa." Page 224.

In the *Church Times* of 22 November 2024, Dr Andrew Purkis who was the Secretary for Public Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1992-97 challenged that criticism by giving the context:

"I recall the team urging the Archbishop, in the desperate battles over priorities, to stick to what only the Archbishop of Canterbury can do (and leave to others what they can do). Otherwise, the job becomes even more exhausting, impossible, and potentially dysfunctional [...]"

Hence, when told in 2013 that serious abuses (but not the full horrors that emerged later) by Smyth were being dealt with by the Bishop of Ely and the Ely Safeguarding Officer, that the police and local authority had been informed, and the Bishop was informing his counterpart in Cape Town, there was good reason for leaving them to take the lead. [...]"

Subsequently, when the Archbishop did intervene publicly in interviews after the Chanel 4 exposé, he raised expectations among survivors which he could not fulfil,

because he was then advised that he shouldn't talk to survivors while the police investigation was continuing, and his few contacts with survivors caused consternation in the National Safeguarding Team Core Group, because it was their responsibility to co-ordinate and lead the church response, including contacts with survivors. [...]

The Archbishop has acknowledged that he could have done more, especially perhaps by using his contacts with the Archbishop of Cape Town to ensure that the Church in South Africa was doing enough to protect Smyth's potential and actual victims there, when the persistent efforts of the Bishop and staff of Ely produced no response. But the Makin report gives little context [...]

In real life, tsunamis of demand pour into Lambeth Palace from every corner of the Church of England itself, from the worldwide Anglican Communion, from ecumenical and interfaith partners, from politicians, the government of the day, the Royal Family, the world of business and trade unions, hundreds of charities, and the media. Perhaps this helps to explain why the Archbishop did not follow up this case that was being dealt with by others? [...]

Despite this, the Archbishop has resigned, not principally, in my view, because of personal culpability, but because the Church as a whole rightly feels intense shame, anger, and guilt at the letting down of so many victims of abuse. He has chosen to take upon himself the sins and failures of the whole. Perhaps that really is one thing that only the Archbishop of Canterbury can do."

Criticism of the Church and Archbishop that the matter was not "reported" to the police in 2013

The Review claims that the Church had not reported the matter to the police in 2013, and that the Archbishop failed to check the accuracy of what he was told:

"John Smyth could and should have been reported to the police in 2013. This could (and probably would) have led to a full investigation, the uncovering of the truth of the serial nature of the abuses in the UK, involving multiple victims and the possibility of a conviction being brought against him. In effect, three and a half years was lost, a time within which John Smyth could have been brought to justice and any abuse he was committing in South Africa discovered and stopped." Paragraph 14.1.1. Page 171.

As set out earlier, the Review details the report and meeting that the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor had with the police in 2013. The Review considers that this was insufficient to constitute a "report" - presumably because the police didn't issue a crime reference number.

The *Church Times* of 29 November 2024 sets out the assessment of three retired senior police officers, that the report and meeting in 2013 did constitute a formal referral to the police. The *Church Times* of 13 December 2024 published a letter from Prof Michael Mulqueen, Emeritus Professor of Policing and National Security. In his view that the matter was properly "reported" to the police but may not have been properly "recorded" by them. The Review is therefore wrong to say it was not "reported":

"If Mr Makin were to confirm, with regard to the Home Office crime recording rules that prevailed in 2013, whether he conflated the act of reporting a crime with that of recording a crime, then the question of whether a cardinal error has heaped injustice upon Archbishop Welby could be resolved."

The *Church Times* of 11 July 2025, Andrew Brown commented:

"Makin claims that, if Smyth had been reported to the police when his abuse was first reported to the diocese of Ely in 2013, he could have been stopped earlier, and that this was in some sense Bishop Welby's fault. This claim fails entirely. Smyth was reported to the police — and, as this newspaper established, reported in proper form, despite Makin's claim that this was not done "formally" (News, 29 November 2024). In fact, Smyth was reported on six separate occasions to different British police forces, none of which did anything; neither, of course, did the South African Anglicans to whom he was reported by the diocese of Ely."

Criticism that he was slow in meeting victims

In February 2017, after the Channel 4 News item, Justin Welby was interviewed on LBC radio:

"15.1.22 Justin Welby was also interviewed outside the LBC studio. With reference to victims, Justin Welby said that *"their interests have to come first"*, *"these are the people we care most about"* and *"they really, really matter"*. These comments were well received by some of the victims we have spoken with and were taken as a clear indication that definite actions would be taken to ensure their welfare." Page 208.

"15.1.62 Victims have expressed their view that there was not a proactive reaching out to victims from the Church at any point during the period that followed the airing of the Channel 4 programmes and that early promises made by Justin Welby to meet with the victims were not honoured. For example:

"...the Archbishop appeared on Channel 4 News and answered some questions about the Church's response to abuse, and in there he said, I think twice, that he would be happy to meet victims, and even by then I was thinking, that's great, and he has my full contact details, but no-one has been in touch to say 'would you like to have a meeting?'. I'm not sure whether he's waiting for, on my part, me to say 'yes, you've said on Channel 4 you're happy to meet us, I'd like to take you up on that', but it seems an odd thing for him to say, and again, not initiate." Pages 214-215.

Archbishop Justin emailed his staff in April 2017 to chase them up about the importance of meeting victims. He wrote, "Is it true that we have made no attempt to contact survivors? If not why not?":

From: Justin Welby Sent: 11 April 2017 22:41

To: Graham Tilby [REDACTED] Ailsa Anderson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Cc: bishopbathwellsanglicanorg

[REDACTED]

Subject: Smyth Dear all, I have just watched a very disturbing report on the BBC.

I realise that like all abuse this is really complicated and that people have been working hard at it. However, the report was either extraordinarily inaccurate or quite worrying. I would be very grateful to know: 1. Is it true that we have made no attempt to contact survivors? If not why not? If we have why was the report so inaccurate? 2. Have they been in contact with us with requests which we could have done something about? How were they answered? We have a well established, well agreed and well followed policy of survivor first. Either (as I suspect is the case) the report was highly inaccurate or we missed a trick. 3. Why was no one able to

Page 216

The Report does not consider this email to be a good thing, instead it sees it as evidence of the "defensiveness" of the Archbishop (paragraph 15.1.66, page 215).

15.1.70 During September 2017, correspondence took place between several victims, Lambeth Palace and the NST [National Safeguarding Team] regarding the possibility of a meeting with Justin Welby" Page 216.

In October 2017 the Bishop at Lambeth and another member of Lambeth Palace staff met the victims:

"15.1.72 Victims report that the tone of the meeting was that that they were "*lucky to be here*", and that this is "*not an Anglican problem*".

Victims wanted to meet the Archbishop personally, not his staff:

"No such meeting took place until April 2021, a clear four years after the programme was first aired. Justin Welby has advised reviewers that in his interactions with the victims and survivors of John Smyth, Justin Welby consistently took and followed the advice of the expert safeguarding colleagues and the Police. Justin Welby complied with requests from the Police not to meet with victims and survivors until their investigations had been completed." Paragraph 15.1.73, Page 217.

The Report appears to criticise the Archbishop for following police advice. It seems to me however that the police advice was inconsistent, why was it acceptable for the Archbishop's staff to meet victims, but not for the Archbishop to meet them?

"1st November 2017 David Porter, Chief Officer from Lambeth Palace, meets with victims. Victims raise concerns about responses in 2012/3. Victims request personal contact with the Archbishop of Canterbury." Page 202.

"April 2018 Victims repeatedly request a meeting with Archbishop of Canterbury - Lambeth Palace state this cannot happen until he understands questions that will be raised by victims." Page 203.

That is also mixed messages, his staff seem to say that he could meet victims if he knows the questions. The Report doesn't dig down into this.

I doubt Archbishop Welby would have put knowing questions in advance as a precondition for meeting a victim. I expect it was the staff who would want to write a briefing for the Archbishop in advance of a meeting who will have put that condition on.

The Report identifies a factual error by the Archbishop when in April 2019 he was interviewed by Cathy Newman of Channel 4 News. The Report quotes him saying "*we were in rapid touch with the survivors*". The Report states:

"This is not correct. There was a very considerable delay in establishing any contacts and in setting up a helpline" Paragraph 15.1.96.f. Page 221.

I think that is a failing of the Archbishop. He may have assumed that that there was rapid contact, but he should not have claimed that if he did not have evidence for it.

"16.2 Towards the end of 2019 and throughout 2020, several victims continued to call for a meeting with Justin Welby. This period is, of course, very much complicated by the global Covid pandemic, making meetings logistically difficult to organise and plan. A meeting, which was eventually held, took place via a Zoom video call in April 2021 with four victims present, as well as Justin Welby, other Lambeth Palace staff and Andrew Graystone. It was a small and relatively short meeting, with limited membership, the offer to meet had not been made to a wider group of victims." (Page 222).

Archbishop Welby had been told by police not to meet survivors until after their investigation was concluded. They concluded their investigation in 2018 following the death of Smyth. It seems to me to be a failing that it then took another year before he met any survivors.

In my view, that is a failing to say sorry for, it does not require resignation.

Criticism of the Archbishop saying that Iwerne is not a Church of England organisation

"15.1.95 On 12th April 2019, Justin Welby was interviewed by Cathy Newman. During this interview, Justin Welby stated that neither John Smyth nor the Iwerne Trust and related camps were "Anglican". This claim has, since, been withdrawn [by] Justin Welby, however the statement caused a great deal of disquiet at the time. This Review firmly establishes John Smyth as a Church officer at the time of abuse, given the definition of 'Church officers' described in Church safeguarding guidance at this time and in this report previously. There is evidence of links too to Iwerne Trust with the Church not only were ordained Church officers employed by the Trust, leading and delivering Iwerne Camp activity. These individuals would have also had pensions paid for by the Church of England, for their work conducted directly for the church.

15.1.96 [...] He claimed that Iwerne is not part of the Church of England, but this is a semantic argument. It is a separate legal entity but many clergymen and some very senior Church figures attended Iwerne, including five who went on to become Bishops and an Archbishop." Page 221.

The Review is right to point out that Smyth was, during the 1980s abuse, a Lay Reader (licensed lay minister) in the Church of England, also that key figures in the Iwerne camps, such as Revd David Fletcher were ordained clergy. But it is not a mere "semantic argument"

that Iwerne was not an Anglican organisation. Iwerne was deliberately a non-denominational organisation even though there were some Church of England clergy who worked for it.

I never attended a Iwerne Camp, because I went to a comprehensive school, not one of the select Independent Schools from which it drew. I was, however, in the late 1980s a leader at other Scripture Union camps that drew from some of the lesser independent schools. The culture was less exclusive / 'extreme' than Iwerne, but like Iwerne the emphasis was on a personal relationship with Jesus. The only guidance on what church to join was that it should be a "Bible believing church" irrespective of denomination.

The criticism of Bishop Jo Bailey Wells

It seems to me that the Report is also unfair to Bishop Jo Bailey Wells from when she was in the role of Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury:

"14.3.12 Jo Bailey Wells subsequently advised Stephen Conway [Bishop of Ely] that she would leave it to the diocese to pursue and to take no further action until the Police had provided further advice. [...] There is no evidence in the Lambeth Palace records passed to Reviewers to indicate that Jo Bailey Wells followed this up. She has said to us that she was extremely busy at the time and that safeguarding referrals were coming into Lambeth Palace very regularly ("one every couple of weeks" as she described it to us). Her memory of the time is that this referral (re John Smyth) was not particularly remarkable within this context of such a volume of referrals coming in. The referral should have stood out as being remarkable – at least three victims were known of, with a further number (around five or six) having been referenced by a victim. Fundamentally, the diocese was expected to follow safeguarding procedures but there was no oversight from Lambeth Palace, even though they had been alerted. This is all the more surprising, given that Lambeth Palace had been told of, and had acknowledged, that Justin Welby may have a connection with John Smyth. It has to be appreciated that Lambeth Palace and the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury do not exercise a function of command and control of the dioceses of the Church of England." Page 184.

14.3.18 [...] Bishop Bailey Wells [...] suggested that safeguarding was not a formal part of her role as Chaplain to the Archbishop [...] Stating that safeguarding is not a formal part of a role runs counter to the important maxim that "Safeguarding is everyone's business". Page 185

Of course, Bishop Jo knows that safeguarding is everyone's business. But that does not mean that everyone must be the co-ordinator. Elsewhere, the Report states that in a safeguarding case it is important to have a:

"Single point of liaison from the Church to Police and vice versa" Paragraph 22.1.13. Page 245.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor in the Diocese of Ely was in that role. I think it unreasonable for the Review to criticise Bishop Jo for leaving it to that person to do their job.

Mixed messages within the Report

There are also some confusion / mixed messages within the Report.

To report or not report? - the problem of data protection

In some places the Report is critical that the National Safeguarding Team (NST) who took the investigation forward were not given enough detailed enough for them to take action. In other places the Report is critical of those who breached data protection by providing names to the NST:

"15.1.77 A victim's name was accidentally disclosed in an email from Lambeth Palace to Moira Murray in the NST on 1st November." (Page 217).

The Report does not set out whether it is ever permissible to disclose a victim's name without their permission.

Lambeth Palace should have / should not have chased up the National Safeguarding Team

Archbishop Justin and Bishop Jo are criticised for not being proactive enough in engaging National Safeguarding Team. But when a member of Lambeth Palace staff, David Porter does do that he is criticised for doing so:

"15.1.81 [...] The minutes suggest that the next Core Group *"to be held either upon receipt of the file from John Smyth survivors or after David Porter's next meeting with the John Smyth survivors' group"* [...]

15.1.82 This appears to show that the meetings being held with David Porter were formally part of the response being coordinated by the Core Group, but as referenced earlier, those meetings had no formal basis and it is unclear what their purpose was. The meetings operated as a distraction to the Core Group-led activities" Page 218.

The Report's recommendations

The Report has 27 recommendations (pages 230-251). I find them disappointing. They are largely either calling for something to be done that the Church is already in the process of doing, or they are calling for more reviews:

"Recommendations:

14. Independently review Church of England systems and constituencies to identify areas of concern that may undermine a 'safeguarding first' approach, highlighting potential conflicts linked to beliefs, reputational damage that may prevent 'whistleblowing' reflecting on the learning from this case." Page 242.

The Church commissioned this independent Review to produce recommendations. After five years of work the Review recommends setting up an independent review to make recommendations!

Professor Peter Sidebotham, writing in the *Church Times* of 22 November 2024 quotes from a best practice guidance for reviews:

"Within the secular child-protection world [...] "recommendations should be few in number and focussed on improving practice, rather than simply increasing bureaucracy with more procedures and rules, monitoring and control" (*Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel guidance for safeguarding partners*, HM Government, 2022).

This report concludes with 27 recommendations, not all of which are meaningful or achievable."

Recommendation 18 is good, for current clergy to have to disclose safeguarding issues that they have not previously disclosed:

"22.1.5 All individuals in roles, including Church officers and ordinands, that are working or will work with children or adults at risk of abuse or neglect, are required to complete a declaration that asks if there is any reason why they should not be working with children and adults experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect. The declaration does not include a requirement to disclose knowledge of abuse to others by others, or to disclose knowledge or awareness of individuals that pose a risk to children or adults. For those that had knowledge of the abuse by John Smyth, had this form included such requirements, it may have provided an opportunity for them to disclose the abuse, enabling it to come to light much sooner. The Church should learn from this and consider adding a declaration related to prior knowledge of abuse to others, by others (individuals or institutions) to this declaration form, and to its Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance."

Subsequent events

Was the Archbishop of Canterbury right to resign?

When the Makin Review was published, Archbishop Justin at first said that he had considered resigning but had decided not to. However, criticism of the Archbishop mounted over the next few days, including from the Bishop of Newcastle, Dr Helen-Ann Hartley, calling for him to resign. Perhaps it was wise for him to resign at that relatively early stage rather than try and hold out only for the pressure to increasingly build and force him to resign a week or two later.

Although I don't think he was personally to blame it may have been one historic safeguarding scandal too many, and given that it was someone that Archbishop Welby had known personally, he was more closely associated with it.

Another aspect is that Archbishop Welby had over the years taken such a leading role in the importance of safeguarding, including increasing the number of safeguarding staff, and had been very uncompromising about any mistakes. Dr Colin Podmore, in the December 2024 / January 2025 edition of *New Directions* magazine, reflects:

"he had personally fostered a culture of zero tolerance of episcopal shortcomings in such cases. In May 2019 Welby suspended Christopher Lowson as Bishop of Lincoln. That his [Lowson's] mishandling of a safeguarding disclosure was eventually found to merit only a 'rebuke' makes his twenty-month suspension seem massively disproportionate. All three retired archbishops living in England (Lords Carey, Hope,

and Sentamu) have at some point had their permissions to officiate withdrawn for past safeguarding failures. Safeguarding requires suspension only where it is necessary to manage a current risk. Suspending retired bishops, none of whom poses a risk to children or vulnerable adults, not from episcopal responsibilities they no longer hold but from celebrating the Eucharist at all, looks like punishment for past failures [...] Having fostered such an unforgiving culture, how could the archbishop not resign on admitting personal failure in relation to a safeguarding disclosure?"

The failings of others - should they be disciplined?

Once Archbishop Welby had resigned, attention spread to others who had been named in the report.

A victim of Smyth's abuse wrote in the *Church Times* of 15 November 2024:

"It is clear from the Makin review that the NST [National Safeguarding Team], thus far, has only asked if those criticised are a current safeguarding risk. The Church has to decide whether a failure over a disclosure of abuse is a disciplinary offence or not. If so, there should be a raft of CDMs [Clergy Discipline Measure complaints] launched on the back of the Makin review. If NST do not launch those, I will."

The *Church Times* of 6 December 2024 reported that the National Safeguarding Team were investigating a range of people for safeguarding failures:

"decisions will be made to determine what action will be taken in respect of individuals, including, where appropriate, disciplinary action. The final stage is "robust external scrutiny" by an independent barrister. If a decision is taken to make a complaint under the CDM, the respondent will then have "the opportunity to have input into the process"

The main failing was in the 1980s by those who had read the Rushton Report and had hushed it up. But they are nearly all dead.

Of those clergy from that period who are still alive, it is hard to see how they could be convicted under the Clergy Discipline Measure for failing to follow safeguarding procedures that did not exist at that time.

One who is still alive from that time is the Revd Hugh Palmer. The *Church Times* of 22 November 2024 reported:

"On Tuesday, the diocese of Gloucester confirmed that permission to officiate (PTO) had been removed from the Revd Hugh Palmer [...] while a safeguarding review was conducted. [...] Mr Palmer told the Makin review that he did not know of the abuse until 2017, despite having visited in hospital a Smyth victim who attempted to take his own life in 1982."

The Clergy Discipline Measure can only be used to discipline clergy, not lay people. One of those most criticised in the Report who is still alive is Mr (now Sir) Jamie Colman, who after the Trustees of Smyth's operation in Zimbabwe resigned on mass due to Smyth continuing to work with children. Mr Colman in 1989 set up his own trustee body to allow Smyth to

continue. The Report states that Mr Coleman refused to engage with the Review. Mr Colman also arranged for his wife, Sue, to be a trustee. She is a member of the clergy but says she did not know the full extent of Smyth's abuses.

On 22 November 2024, the *Church Times* reported that:

"the diocese of Winchester announced that the Revd Sue Colman and her husband, Sir Jamie Colman, had been asked to step back from their involvement with St Leonard's Oakley, where Ms Colman is a non-stipendiary minister, and Sir Jamie volunteers."

Bishop Jo Bailey Wells has "stepped back" from ministry whilst a safeguarding risk assessment is undertaken into her (reported in *The Church Times*, 6 December 2024).

The *Church Times* of 29 November 2024 reports that the retired bishop the Rt Revd Paul Butler has been "asked to 'step back' from ministry while safeguarding reviews" are conducted. He was President of Scripture Union for some of the period (2011-17), which was a body that Titus Trust and Iwerne were members of.

The National Safeguarding Team were also reviewing the actions of the Revd Tim Hastie Smith and the Revd Richard Coombs, and have concluded a review into the Revd Vaughan Roberts.

Prebendary John Woolmer, who retired in 2007, is also being investigated. The *Church Times* quotes:

"In an appendix to the the review, Prebendary Woolmer writes: "I deeply regret not breaking the 'seal of the confessional' but I doubt it would make much difference."

This is a misuse of the term "the seal of the confessional", which is referring to a particular liturgical practice where a penitent person makes a confession to God in the presence of a priest about a sin they have committed. The priest is not permitted to break that confidentiality. "The seal of the confessional" does not mean that priests are not allowed to break a confidentiality in other contexts.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, was Principal of Trinity Theological College in 1983 when Smyth did a short course of study there, and the Report says that it is likely that Carey knew something of Smyth's abuse and was another person who didn't report it to the police. Lord Carey does not recall this matter. In 2020 during the Review process Lord Carey's permission to lead church services (permission to officiate - PTO) was withdrawn whilst a risk assessment of him was undertaken. His PTO was restored in 2021 at the conclusion of that risk assessment. In December 2024 Lord Carey resigned his PTO, stating "I am in my ninetieth year now..." (*The Church Times* 3 January 2025).

Internationally, the Archbishop of Cape Town, Dr Thabo Makgoba, has been criticised for insufficient action when in 2013 the then Bishop of Ely, reported Smyth's abuse to the Diocese of Cape Town where Smyth was living. Archbishop Makgoba has announced a review.

Implications for the choice of the next Archbishop of Canterbury

The process is beginning for appointing the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

The longer any bishop has been in post, the more safeguarding cases will have crossed their desks in the past, and the greater the chance that they will have made a mistake with one of those cases. If they are chosen to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, the Press will seek to dig up that past mistake and say that this person is not fit to be Archbishop.

This has already happened with the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, who when he became Bishop of Chelmsford in 2010, appears to have allowed a priest, David Tudor, to be reappointed as area dean despite Mr Tudor having been under restrictions following a safeguarding risk assessment. The Bishop of Newcastle, who called on Archbishop Welby to resign is now calling on Archbishop Cottrell to resign (The *Church Times*, 20/27 December 2024).

A spokesperson for Archbishop Cottrell has responded that:

"he acknowledges this could have been handled differently, and regrets that it wasn't, but his focus throughout his time as Bishop of Chelmsford was, with the help of safeguarding professionals, to understand, assess and manage the risk of David Tudor." (The *Church Times*, 3 January 2025)

One might think that the safe option is to choose as Archbishop of Canterbury a bishop who has only been in post a short time. They will have had fewer safeguarding cases to deal with, and those cases that they have had will have been when all of today's policies and procedures were in place to guide them.

But an approach of "let's choose someone inexperienced because they won't have had time to make many mistakes" does not feel like a very Christian criteria for choosing an Archbishop of Canterbury.

January 2025

Update: 10 March 2025.

South African enquiries

On 3 February 2025, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) published the outcome of its "Inquiry into Matters Relating to Mr John Smyth and Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)".

https://anglicanchurchsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Panel-of-Inquiry_Smyth-and-ACSA_31-January-2025_Final.pdf

The 29-page report addresses whether enough was done by ACSA when in 2013 the then Bishop of Ely, Stephen Conway, wrote to Bishop Garth Counsell, Bishop of Table Bay (the letter incorrectly titled him "Bishop of Cape Town"). Bishop Counsell acted on the letter by contacting the vicar of the church where Smyth was attending and warning the vicar. The vicar challenged Smyth who then immediately left the church and moved to another one (not an ACSA church).

Should Bishop Counsell have done more to spread the word across churches in South Africa warning them of Smyth? He didn't, but that was probably not helped by the fact that the letter from the Bishop of Ely was marked "strictly private and confidential" (paragraph 8.3 of the Report). That title implies that the matter is not to be passed on.

To be fair, the letter also "contemplates liaison between the COE and ACSA safeguarding authorities "to take the matter forward in cooperation with our respective police authorities."" However:

"it is not clear what "action" by ACSA could have been contemplated: short of a UK police investigation and the laying of criminal charges in the UK, and the institution of extradition proceedings in South Africa. Smyth could not be pursued in South Africa for alleged offences committed elsewhere." (Footnote 32).

This did happen five years later, after matters hit the Press and the UK police were more proactive in their enquiries, when the UK police wrote to Smyth in 2018, a week before his death to answer UK police enquiries or be extradited. (Para 5.4).

Hopefully some good will come out of the ACSA report, because the authors take the opportunity to recommend that the Anglican Church in South Africa speed up its implementation of safeguarding procedures across the church (paragraph 10.15.m).

Possible disciplinary proceedings in the Church of England

On 25 February 2025, the Church of England issued this Press Release:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p06zq22f>

"Conclusion of Makin Review four-step process
25/02/2025

The National Safeguarding Team has today announced the conclusion of the work to review all clergy under the authority or oversight of the Church of England who are criticised in the Makin review, published in November. The review was commissioned to look at the Church's handling of the allegations of the horrendous abuse by the late John Smyth.

This has been a rigorous and independent process to look at whether those named present any immediate risk and consider whether there is a case for disciplinary proceedings for clergy, under the Clergy Discipline Measure. This has been undertaken in line with the process announced in December with recommendations of an independent panel and reviewed by an independent barrister.

Following this, the National Safeguarding Team will now seek to bring disciplinary proceedings under the Clergy Discipline Measure against the following:

- Bishop Paul Butler
- Bishop George Carey
- Revd Roger Combes
- Revd Sue Colman
- Revd Andrew Cornes

- Revd Tim Hastie-Smith
- Revd Hugh Palmer
- Revd Paul Perkin
- Revd Nick Stott
- Revd John Woolmer

In all cases, the CDM will be ‘out of time’ and so the permission of the President of the Tribunals will need to be sought to bring such cases. This will be done by the National Director of Safeguarding, Alexander Kubeyinje.

In reaching its conclusions, the Stage 3 panel has considered the safeguarding policies and guidance which were in force at the relevant time, the facts of the particular case, the relevant legal considerations and whether there is sufficient evidence to justify proceedings. The conclusions at Stage 3 were validated by the independent barrister at Stage 4 in the external scrutiny process,

In respect of all those under the authority or oversight of the Church of England not listed here but criticised in the Makin Review, the process has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to meet the threshold for instituting disciplinary proceedings at this time. There are two priests criticised in the report whose actions have not yet been reviewed as they are subject to other live, ongoing, processes. Once these have concluded, they will be reviewed following the 4-stage process.

Victims and survivors and all those criticised in the Makin review have been informed and support offered.

Alexander Kubeyinje, the Church of England’s National Director of Safeguarding, said: “We must not forget that at heart of this case are the survivors and victims who have endured the lifelong effects of the appalling abuse by John Smyth, we are truly sorry. Today we have announced next steps in the process looking at both risk and disciplinary processes. We know this will never undo the harm caused but the Church is committed to taking very seriously its response to the findings of the review as well as responding to its recommendations.”

The National Safeguarding Team can make no further comment on these cases whilst the CDM proceedings are under way."

On 5 June 2025, the Church of England issued the following statement:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-news-releases/next-stage-makin-review-cdms-announced>

“Next stage of Makin Review CDMs announced
05/06/2025

Following the conclusion of the work to review all clergy under the authority or oversight of the Church of England who are criticised in the Makin review, it was announced in February that the National Safeguarding Team (NST) would seek to bring disciplinary proceedings under the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) against 10 clergy including two bishops. In all cases, the complaint was ‘out of time’ and so the permission of the President of the Tribunals needed to be sought to initiate

proceedings. The President has now considered the applications and granted permission in seven of the 10 cases. This is an independent judicial process, and the National Safeguarding Team entirely respect the decisions.

The NST will now initiate proceedings under the CDM against the following individuals:

Bishop Paul Butler
Revd Roger Combes
Revd Sue Colman
Revd Andrew Cornes
Revd Tim Hastie-Smith
Revd Nick Stott
Revd John Woolmer

No further action under the CDM will be taken against the following individuals:

Bishop George Carey
Revd Paul Perkin
Revd Hugh Palmer

The decision to bring CDMs was undertaken in line with the process announced in December and concluded in February with recommendations of an independent panel and reviewed by an independent barrister.

Victims and survivors and all those criticised in the Makin review have been informed and support offered. The National Safeguarding Team will make no further comment on these cases whilst the CDM proceedings are under way.”

Update: January 2026

On 11 December 2025, the Church of England issued a Press Release <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-news-releases/statement-smyth-documentary> making a further apology, prompted by a two-part documentary broadcast on Channel 4 “*See No Evil*” <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/see-no-evil>

The documentary interviews the victims/survivors, and Smyth’s wife and children – who are themselves also victims/survivors. It is moving to hear directly from those recounting on television the terrible abuse that they suffered, they are brave to have done so.

The documentary rightly criticises the original cover-up by those involved in the Iwerne Trust. The documentary focuses on the failings of the church. It doesn’t address the failings of the police.

The journalist Cathy Newman says at one point that the original cover-up by the Iwerne leaders in the 1980s this was out of a desire to protect the reputation of the Church of England. I don’t think that is right. It was out of a desire to protect the reputation of the evangelical ministry of the Iwerne camps. Evangelicals often sit light to their allegiance to the Church of England – some describing it as the ‘most convenient boat to fish from’ – and are often happy to publicly criticise the CofE when it strays from sound doctrine.

Andy Morse gives a moving account of his abuse. As a 20 year old student he attempted suicide as the only way out of Smyth's control and beatings. This suicide attempt is what prompted the investigation and the original Ruston Report. He describes, after his recovery in hospital:

"I was contacted by one of the leading officers at Iwerne. He said he'd like to take me out to a local Indian restaurant. We had an entertaining chat. Towards the end of the meal, he suddenly became serious, and he leant forward and he said to me, "Andy, I want you to know, that John Smyth will be held to account for what he has done." But he said "the reputation of Iwerne is sacrosanct, so let's keep this between ourselves." (Episode 1, 51 minutes).

Smyth was not held to account by them. He was allowed by the Iwerne leaders to quietly leave the country. Note it was the "reputation of Iwerne" not the reputation of the CofE that they wanted to preserve.

Meanwhile, the CofE process of seeking to hold to account those who are still alive today, who knew what Smyth had done but did not do enough at the time, is continuing.

The 11 December Press Release states, "The National Safeguarding Team has taken out complaints under the Clergy Discipline Measure against 11 members of the clergy criticised in the Makin Review, seven of which are currently in progress."

I expect that several will result in some form of sanction.

Of the other four that have concluded two have had a published outcome explaining why they have been dismissed.

The first was made by the National Safeguarding Team ("the complainant") against the Revd Tim Hastie-Smith ("the respondent"). The outcome by the President of Tribunals, was published on the Church of England website in November:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/cdm-sec-13-decision-kubeyinje-v-hastie-smith.pdf>

"5. The respondent is named in the Makin Review as having received reports in late 2014 and early 2015 (the 'Ruston' and 'Stileman' reports) of the abuses committed by Smyth, at a time when the respondent was the National Director of the Scripture Union.

6. The complaint alleges that the respondent's response to this information was inadequate, in that he failed to take any or any sufficient action to report or otherwise act upon disclosures made to him from October 2014 onwards.

7. By a decision dated 20th May 2025 I gave permission for this complaint to be made outside the one-year time limit referred to in the Measure. [...]

8. I noted also that:

'the complaint as presently formulated in the complainant's Form 1c does lack clarity as to what it is said that the respondent should have done. If this complaint is to proceed, it will be necessary for the complainant to make clear, at least, (1) whether it

is accepted that the respondent did refer the matter to the Scripture Union safeguarding lead and to Bishop Paul Butler and (2) if so, what more it is alleged that he should have done but failed to do.’ [...]

11. [...] the respondent explains (among other things) that it was the responsibility of the safeguarding lead and not the person receiving the disclosure to ensure that a disclosure such as that in the present case was made to the appropriate authorities; that he reported the disclosure made to him to the safeguarding lead; that he was informed that the matter had already been reported to a number of police forces as well as the Church of England national safeguarding adviser; [...] that the Scripture Union Board of Trustees discussed and agreed with the approach being taken, i.e. that the safeguarding lead would continue to deal with the matter; that the respondent did not himself report the matter to the police or the national church as this was not his role and he had been assured that the matter had been reported to four police forces and the national church; and that he was frustrated that the various police forces were not taking the matter forward. [...]

17. The critical point, as it seems to me, is that the respondent did report appropriately the disclosures which were made to him. [...]

20. The respondent has been the subject of much unfavourable criticism. Now that the complaint against him has been fully investigated, it is apparent that this criticism was unfounded.

21. For the reasons given above the complaint against the Reverend Tim Hastie-Smith is dismissed.”

In the *Church Times* letters to the Editor of 19 December 2025, Graham, one of the victims of Smyth, who had taken part in the documentary, raises a challenge to us all today. We may today follow all the safeguarding procedures. But what if that is not enough?

“Madam, — As a victim of John Smyth who has campaigned for years, I am pleased with the documentary *See No Evil*. I came forward to disclose the abuse in 2012, and, almost 14 years later, our story is told, and told well, with the collaboration of a number of victims.

I do reflect that, almost 14 years later, there are still great gaps in our understanding of why Smyth was not stopped first in 1982, but then more recently in 2013, when multiple senior clerics had the disclosure. [...] Lots of people say that they did “what they were required to”, but patently Smyth was not stopped, and was not brought to justice. No one actually did what was needed.”

There is no excuse for the inaction and cover-up of the 1980s. But in the 2010s when the church reported it to four police forces who took no action, and Smyth was living in South Africa, what more should the church have done to bring him to justice?

Perhaps they could have tried to take out a private prosecution. But when Royal Mail took out private prosecutions against their staff it became a scandal as innocent people were convicted. As a result Royal Mail no longer undertakes private prosecutions, they leave it to the police.

What led the police to finally start to act was when the Channel 4 News exposure put the abuse into the headlines, and more victims then came forward. Perhaps if the Church had at the time told the police that if the police did not take action the Church would expose the police inaction in the Press, that might have pushed the police into taking the action needed?

The second case that has been dismissed was the complaint by the National Director of Safeguarding ('the complainant') against the Venerable Roger Combes ('the respondent'). The decision was published in December 2025:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/cdm-s.17-decision-kubeyinje-v-combes.pdf>

The judgment states:

“16. The respondent was given a copy of the report by Mark Ruston in or around March 1982. His initials ‘RMC’ appear in a list under the heading ‘Circulation’. Other recipients whose initials appear in the list were more senior within the church than the respondent. They included trustees of the Iwerne Trust. All the other recipients are now dead, as is Mark Ruston himself who died in 1990.”

“26. The complainant’s case is that the respondent should have reported the matter to the appropriate church or secular authorities. However, the complainant has not identified the church authorities to whom the matter should have been reported. In 1982 there were no safeguarding advisers, as there are now, and I accept the respondent’s point that the obvious and probably the only church authority to whom he might have been expected to report the matter was his training incumbent. However, that was Mark Ruston, who was the source of the respondent’s own knowledge, who plainly knew more about Smyth’s abuses already than the respondent did, and who the respondent understood to be dealing with the matter.”

“28. We now know that by the time he wrote his report, Mark Ruston had come to believe that Smyth had indeed committed criminal offences, and that neither he nor anyone else reported the matter to the police or took steps to ensure that Smyth was never given the opportunity to work with children or young men again. That was a major failing. However, it was not a failing for which the respondent should be held responsible. Nor should he, as the only survivor of those who received the Ruston report, be made a scapegoat for the failings – indeed the disastrous failings – of those more senior than him.”

Update: March 2026

The February meeting of the General Synod received the report “Making Recommendations Task and Finish Group – Interim Report”, GS Misc 1433.

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/gs-misc-1433-makin-task-and-finish-interim-report_0_0.pdf

The report confirmed that the Makin Report’s recommendations should be implemented and it gave some guidance and targets. They will issue a follow-up report to the July 2026 General Synod.

On 25 February 2026, the Decision of the President of Clergy Discipline Measure Tribunals of the complaint made by the National Director of Safeguarding against the Revd Prebendary John Woolmer was published:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/cdm-sec.-17-decision-kubeyinje-v-woolmer-24.2.2026.pdf>

He was accused of taking insufficient action when two boys reported the beatings to him in 1979 and 1981/2. There were different accounts of what the disclosures actually were.

The President decided:

“16. It is difficult, and would be difficult for any tribunal, to reach firm conclusions about exactly what the respondent was told in conversations which took place more than 40 years ago. [...]

19. [...] I have concluded that the respondent’s conduct does not meet the threshold required for a finding of misconduct.”

Update August 2026

On 6 August 2026 the outcome of a Bishop’s Disciplinary Tribunal was published:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-08/decision-on-cdm-re-cornes-04.08.26-002.pdf>

The charge was:

“2. ‘The conduct of the Reverend Canon Andrew Cornes was neglectful or otherwise inefficient in the performance of the duties of his office within the meaning of section 8(1)(c) of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 in that he failed to take any, or any sufficient, action to report or otherwise act upon information received by him in or around autumn 1982 about abuses perpetrated by John Smyth QC.’”

The complaint was brought by the Director of the National Safeguarding Team (‘the Complainant’) against the Reverend Canon Andrew Cornes (‘the Respondent’). One of Smyth’s victims had reported to him in 1982 that he had been abused by Smyth, that the abuse had now stopped.

There was no safeguarding training in 1982, and he had considered this a pastoral matter which he was bound to keep confidential.

Today we have safeguarding training and are taught that if someone asks us to keep something confidential, we have to explain that we may not be able to if we need to report something in order to protect others.

The Tribunal found that:

“34. [...] No safeguarding policy was necessary or training required to appreciate that disclosures such as that which he had received needed to be passed on to others for a number of reasons: the account needed to be confirmed, the victims were entitled to protection and the perpetrator had to be exposed and desistance and discontinuance of those activities brought about. [...] Even if he was told that matters were being

investigated by other senior leaders, he took no steps to confirm that that was the position. [...]

36. [...] This was a young man who had come to him with a serious disclosure about conduct forced on him and on other young men. A young man who may not have had the knowledge, experience, courage or desire to request any further action be taken in respect of the disclosures but that in our view did not absolve the respondent from a duty to do something more.”

I expect that the next step will be a sanctions hearing where the Tribunal decide what sanction to impose on Revd Cornes.

Adrian Vincent. August 2026