

BBC RADIO 4 'TODAY' PROGRAMME

SATURDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2018

TRANSCRIPT OF ITEM ABOUT BISHOP GEORGE BELL

JW Justin Webb ('Today' presenter)
DB Desmond Browne QC
GB Bishop George Bell (recorded, speaking in 1957)
MB Martin Bashir (BBC Religion Editor)
Lrd C Lord Alex Carlile CBE QC, Independent Reviewer
AC Andrew Chandler (Bell's biographer)
TT Bishop Tim Thornton, Bishop at Lambeth
ABC Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby

Starting at 08.37 and ending at 08.45

JW People who say they were survivors, or are survivors, of sexual abuse in the Church of England are gathering in protest this morning against the way their cases have been handled, but a lawyer who investigated one case of alleged abuse against a long-dead bishop has told this programme the Church is behaving like a dictatorial government. Lord Carlile found failings in the way the Church investigated claims of abuse against the former bishop, George Bell. BBC News has learned that the Church has denied Bell's family the chance to be represented by a lawyer in a new investigation into... Here's our Religion Editor, Martin Bashir.

"Christ is the King, O friends rejoice..." (congregational singing)

MB The hymn, written by Bishop George Bell, who died 60 years ago, but whose reputation is still the subject of contention between his supporters and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

DB It won't be resolved until there is an unequivocal acknowledgement that Bell was an innocent man.

MB The barrister, Desmond Browne QC, who was baptised by George Bell.

"O magnify the Lord, and raise..." (singing)

- GB "I'm in a new town, and speaking to you in a new church, one of the newest in Sussex."
- MB George Bell, preaching in 1957. The former Bishop of Chichester's heroic reputation was first questioned two years ago when the Church paid almost £17,000 to a woman who said she'd been sexually abused. An independent review by the barrister, Lord Carlile, called the Church's investigation "inadequate", and too willing to believe the accuser. The Church accepted his criticisms, but the Archbishop of Canterbury said a 'significant cloud' was left over Bell's name. I asked George Bell's biographer, Andrew Chandler, whether he had any sympathy for Justin Welby's predicament.
- MB On the one hand he has scores of complainants, people who have alleged that they've been victims of relentless abuse. At the same time, he's trying to respect the memory of a deceased bishop.
- AC I do not accept that he has respected the memory of a long-dead bishop. I think if a horde of Visigoths had been invited to trample on the memory of Bishop Bell, they could hardly have done a more thorough job.
- MB Ten days ago the Church announced it had passed fresh information about George Bell to the police, but gave no further details, and said it'll hold its own new inquiry. The BBC has seen correspondence which denies George Bell's surviving family the chance to be represented by the barrister, Desmond Browne. Church officials have instead chosen a safeguarding expert. Lord Carlile says his recommendations are being ignored.
- Lrd C The Church, in doing that, is behaving in a very peculiar way, rather like a small dictatorial government deciding to go ahead in any way it wishes, regardless of due process and the rule of law. It flies in the face of the recommendations I made which the Church said it accepted, and I'm afraid the Church has got to get a grip on this.
- MB During his speech at Synod yesterday Justin Welby made only the briefest of references to the issue of abuse.

- ABC “Our approach to safeguarding needs culture change. Our renewing...”
- MB Later this morning a large gathering of survivors will confront members of Synod as they arrive at Church House. They’re angry about the way the Church has handled their complaints of abuse. Bishop Bell’s biographer, Dr Andrew Chandler, says the burden of responsibility now rests at the very top.
- AC I can’t think of any other Archbishop of Canterbury in modern times who has become so deeply and so publicly embroiled in a debate of this kind, and, in that sense, we are on new ground. And it’s very difficult to know exactly where it might lead.
- JW Well, that’s Bishop George Bell’s biographer, Andrew Chandler, ending that report from Martin Bashir. We can talk to Tim Thornton, who used to be the Bishop of Truro, is now the Bishop at Lambeth, who works directly for the Archbishop of Canterbury. Good morning to you.
- TT Good morning.
- JW On that point about George Bell’s family being allowed to use the legal representation that they choose, why shouldn’t they?
- TT It’s not a question of whether they should or shouldn’t. Actually, in Lord Carlile’s report he doesn’t actually make that specific point. What he says is that there should be somebody who is appointed to speak out on behalf of the deceased person who allegations have been made against, and on behalf of any family they may have.
- JW Yeah, and they’ve chosen someone and you’re saying they can’t.
- TT No, that’s something that we have done. What your whole package seemed to ignore is that people have come forward, very sadly, and made complaints about behaviour that happened a long time ago.
- JW Yeah.
- TT What we’re doing is taking their voice very seriously indeed.

JW Can I just get this straight? The family want to be represented by a barrister, whose name is Desmond Browne. May he represent them?

TT What, what we've done is set up a Core Group following new information that came forward after the report done by Lord Carlile was published. That Core Group has met, and at that Core Group was somebody who was there to represent the deceased person in this case, Bishop George Bell...

JW Yes, but they didn't choose him, the family didn't choose him. Why shouldn't they choose the person?

TT If you let me finish, the point I'm making is that that first Core Group has to make a decision about whether the evidence that's come forward is credible or not. I think you'd accept with me, it's completely wrong for the family to be concerned about matters until the matters are seen to be credible. It would be very wrong for us to go to the family of the deceased person and raise an issue with them which then doesn't need to be looked into any further.

JW But surely they have some standing in this? They need to know what the allegations are and have a say over whether they think they're credible or not, otherwise there's no point in having the meeting.

TT They do, and that's what we're doing. We're in communication with the family. We're taking that forward.

JW So you're saying that, that what you're doing is right, you're sticking up for it in spite of what Lord Carlile said, and they are not going to be allowed to be represented by their own barrister?

TT No, what I'm saying is that we are taking Lord Carlile's recommendations very seriously, they are going through our processes, even before they've done that, and it's tragic, isn't it, that some, some more information has come forward since the publication of Lord Carlile's report, and we are taking the voice of the survivors and those who are complaining very seriously. And in that process we are putting forward somebody who will represent the voice of Bishop Bell, and I ...

JW But not the person they want. That's the point.

- TT ... and we will be in communication with the family.
- JW Yeah. But not, it's not the person they want? They're not going to get the person they want.
- TT We shall be in communication with the family.
- JW Is there still a 'significant cloud' over George Bell's name?
- TT It is very sad to say that further information has come forward and until this whole matter has been resolved, I can't say what will be the outcome.
- JW But there is still, in your view, and that was the phrase used by the Archbishop, wasn't it, a 'significant cloud' over George Bell's name, that is still the position?
- TT Yes.
- JW He also talked about culture change, we heard that in the package when he was talking to us. When he talks about culture change, what does he mean?
- TT I think he means that we all have to take the voice of the survivors in this matter very seriously, that's why the Archbishops of Canterbury and York will be outside the entrance to Church House this morning at nine o'clock, standing alongside the survivors who turn up, in silence thinking and reflecting on the shameful fact that so many, sadly, senior church people have abused people in the past. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has made very clear on many occasions, this is something that really does concern him, and he is ashamed to think of what we've done, and therefore we have to listen very carefully to the voice of the survivors, take seriously what they're saying, and this morning, not just at the protest that's happening beforehand but at the presentation in Synod, all members of General Synod will be hearing the voice of survivors.
- JW And, alongside the voice of the survivors, must be justice towards those who are accused, mustn't it?

TT Justice for everybody involved in these horrendous processes.

JW Tim Thornton, Bishop Tim Thornton, thank you very much.

NR [Nick Robinson] It's now a quarter to nine.