

# Justin Welby/Cathy Newman interview

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## **Presenter**

It was a 2017 Channel Four News investigation that first exposed the abuse by John Smyth, described today as the church's most prolific abuser. And a warning, you might find some of the details in Cathy Newman's report distressing.

## **John Smyth**

I'm John Smyth, and my background is as a British advocate.

## **Cathy Newman**

This is John Smyth, barrister, friend of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and now deemed the Church of England's most prolific serial abuser. 'This is Cathy Newman from Channel Four News. We're told that you beat young men until they bled. Why did you do that?' In 2017 we revealed that he groomed boys and young men at Christian summer camps, universities, and Winchester college. before subjecting them to savage beatings. The review led by former Social Services Director Keith Makin says that over a 40 year period, John Smyth became arguably the most prolific serial abuser to be associated with the Church of England- operating in three different countries and involving as many as 130 boys and young men. Former vicar Mark Stibbe endured beatings when he was at Winchester college in the 1980s, some boys were beaten so hard they bled and had to wear nappies.

## **Mark Stibbe**

He had a new shed built, which was soundproofed. I don't remember very much about it, except nappies, adult nappies. I remember it being enclosed, claustrophobic. I remember feeling trapped. But I think the thing that I will never forget is my friend's suicide attempt, and having to explain to his father why his son had tried to take his life. And I was trying to tell him, it's not your fault. It's someone else's fault.

## **Cathy Newman**

Another victim is so traumatized he can't bear to recall the details.

## **Graham**

I've seen two psychologists and a psychiatrist over the last seven years, and have complex PTSD. I try to remember the pain but I can't actually retrieve that from my memory. I've put the abuse somewhere where I can't remember it.

## **Cathy Newman**

A vicar compiled a secret report about Smyth's abuse in 1982 but the Makin review says senior members of the Church participated in a cover up of it. Within a few years, several bishops and very senior figures within the Church of England, or those who went on to very senior positions, including Archbishops and Queens Chaplain's had got wind of what was going on. Author Andrew Graystone has spent the best part of a decade representing victims, and trying to get the truth for them,

**Andrew Graystone**

The sheer number of clergy who knew about John Smyth at various stages in the last 40 years is astonishing. Amongst those who are still serving, at least five bishops and one Archbishop knew. Amongst those who are retired at least another four bishops and one Archbishop, and then at least another 30 more junior clergy named in the Makin review knew about John Smyth and his abuse over the years.

**Cathy Newman**

Not a single bishop has been formally held to account. This

**Graham**

is not just a matter of a few clergy here and there, but this is people at the very highest level of the Church of England. This church is supposed to be the moral conscience of our nation, in many ways. It's very distressing.

**Cathy Newman**

At the heart of the Makin review is a damning indictment of failings at the very top, including the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. From July 2013 the Church of England knew at the highest level about the abuse that took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Archbishop of Canterbury's personal chaplain, a priest and the Bishop of Ely were all made aware of the abuse, and Justin Welby became aware of the abuse alleged against John Smyth in around August 2013 . There was a distinct lack of curiosity shown by these senior figures and a tendency towards minimisation of the matter. Here's what the Archbishop told us in response to our investigation,

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

I genuinely had no idea that there was anything as horrific as this going on and the kind of story you showed on the clip. If I'd known that, I would have been very active, but I had no suspicions at all.

**Cathy Newman**

The Makin review says this was one of many incorrect assertions, and that enough was known to have raised concerns upon being informed in 2013

**Mark Stibbe**

Someone has got to take responsibility. He knew most of the victims. He is the most senior person in the Anglican Communion, and you cannot have someone in that position failing spectacularly, not being held to account. So he should resign. I believe so. Yes.

**Cathy Newman**

Smyth left the UK in 1984 for Zimbabwe and then South Africa, where he continued his abuse. The Makin review, again criticizes Justin Welby for failing in his personal and moral responsibility to ensure the church authorities in Cape Town knew of the dangers. No fewer than five police forces here in the UK were belatedly told of Smyth's abuse between 2014 and 2016. After our original investigation, Hampshire police reopened their inquiries, but in the very month they tried to contact him for an interview, Smyth died suddenly in Cape Town in August, 2018

**Mark Stibbe**

I have seen the effect, the catastrophic toxic effect on other people's lives in terms of depression, mental health, suicide attempts, broken marriages, broken lives, broken hearts, and to a certain extent, that's been true of me as well.

**Cathy Newman**

Victims are now demanding that the church be stripped of its responsibility for handling abuse allegations. That may now be a matter for Archbishop Welby's successor. Whoever takes over has a formidable, perhaps an impossible, challenge, to ensure justice is done for abuse survivors.

**Presenter**

Well, we went to Winchester College, the former Bishop of Ely and the Archbishop of Canterbury's former Chaplain for comment. Earlier, Cathy Newman sat down with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby himself, and she began by asking for his reaction to the report.

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

I take responsibility for the consequences and for dealing with it now, since I was Archbishop. When the abuse took place in the UK, I was in my late teens, early 20s, some of it was before I was even come to Christian faith, many years before I was ordained. And it was one of a number of horrific legacy, historical legacy cases of abuse that I found. When I came into being Archbishop in 2013 I was told about this. I heard about this for the first time in July, August, 2013 about four months after I took over and didn't know anything before then, or I have any suspicions.

**Cathy Newman**

Well, that's not quite true. We'll come back to that. But you know, you you say you're dealing with this now, but you have been Archbishop for nearly a decade, and what the Makin review sets out is that senior church leaders, including yourself, missed so many opportunities to deal with this. Do you accept that?

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

I accept that from August 2013 until your program uncovered this in a documentary in 2017 that I did not - and I take responsibility for this, and it was a failure and a ready, shaming failure - I did not ensure that this was pursued as energetically, as remorselessly as it should have been.

**Cathy Newman**

You knew, in the 1980s you know, you went to the camps and so on. You exchanged Christmas cards with John Smyth after he moved to Zimbabwe, he continued to abuse boys there, and I see you don't know about that, but you also funded his mission out there. I mean, that suggests that this was more than a passing acquaintance with this man.

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

Lots of people funded his mission, funding his mission. I mean, I don't know what its spending was, but it was a lot. I suspect, I have no idea. I never saw the accounts. I think on two separate occasions, I gave 40 or 50 pounds.

**Cathy Newman**

Now, when we spoke in 2019, after my investigation, you said. And just to quote back to you, you said, 'I genuinely had no idea that there was anything as horrific as this going on. If I'd known that, I'd have

been very active, but I had no suspicions at all.' I mean, no suspicions at all. You'd just been informed of the seriousness of John Smyth's abuse in 2013

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

I was told there was an accusation of abuse, and this is where I went wrong. Safeguarding at that point had one person for the National part of the Church of England, half time. We're now around 40, and those are reforms I bought in myself. At that time, I asked the necessary questions, which I did right, which was to say, Have the police been informed? Have social services been informed? I was told they had.

**Cathy Newman**

Did you not think when you saw that man's name? Do you think, 'Oh, I shared a dormitory with him, I exchanged Christmas cards with him. I funded his mission.' Did you not think I must make sure and do everything I personally can to ensure that no other victims in South Africa suffer what all those poor victims suffered in the UK and then Zimbabwe? It

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

It wasn't until rather later tragically that we saw the Ruston report, which detailed the

**Cathy Newman**

This was the secret report in 1982?

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

The secret report. And when you read that, you just wanted to go and be sick, it was infinitely worse than the verbal report I was given.

**Cathy Newman**

I mean, the victims are calling for your resignation.

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

I know and I understand why they're doing that. What happened? I was given advice about police inquiries and and this sort of thing, and now we have a system that we put in place because of this, some long before this report, that would prevent me not doing something and being given that advice. I shouldn't have taken the advice. My heart said, see them, and I should have followed my heart on that. It's my fault.

**Cathy Newman**

You've just avoided the question, which was the victims want you to resign? Will you resign?

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

I've been giving that a lot of thought for actually, quite a long time. There's nothing over the last 10 years that has been as horrible as dealing with, not just this one, but innumerable other abuse cases, as you will see from the ICCSA inquiry and other things. I've given it a lot of thought. I've taken advice, as recently as this morning from senior colleagues, and no, I'm not going to resign for this. If I'd known before 2013 or had grounds for suspicion, that would be a resigning matter then and now, but I didn't.

**Cathy Newman**

but you considered it as recently as this morning?

**Archbishop Justin Welby**

Yes.

**Cathy Newman**

Justin Welby, thanks very much.