



A transcript of the oral closing submission from the Archbishops' Council for the Peter Ball case study as part of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) on 27 July 2018.

Chair, members of the Panel -

We will file written closing submissions in due course, and they will address, in greater detail than I can do now, issues such as the ways in which it appears to us that the Church failed in its dealings with Peter Ball and those whom he abused; what those failings tell us about the Church at the time, and what needed to change; and where the process of change currently stands.

What the Archbishops' Council can best do, in the time that we have today, is to convey as clear a message as we possibly can about the evidence that the Inquiry has heard this week.

Dame Moira Gibb's report said, and she has reaffirmed just now, that cultural change requires commitment from the whole Church, but particularly from its leaders, and a readiness to call to account.

Part of doing that, we believe, is to be loud and clear and unequivocal in what we say on behalf of the Church now.

The picture which emerged from the Gibb Report, even before the Inquiry's investigation and this hearing, was bad enough.

The Gibb Report was enough by itself for us to say in our opening on Monday that the Church was sorry and ashamed, and also for the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the lead safeguarding bishop, to use the very strong language that they did upon the report's publication.

We also said in opening that we were committed to listening and to learning from this week's hearings.

We have listened to what we have heard.

In the light of the evidence given this week, and the material that the Inquiry has with great diligence assembled and organised, it seems to us that the picture that has emerged is even worse than it may previously have appeared.

Because of the Gibb Report, as well as some of the work done by Kate Wood and others after 2008, much of the factual material concerning the handling of matters by the Church is not new, although in some respects the Inquiry has been able to bring out further factual detail.

However, the way in which the Inquiry has marshalled that evidence, and the spotlight that has been shone upon it in the oral hearings, has highlighted just how shocking and appalling a picture it paints. That is especially so in relation to the earlier part of the period under scrutiny, even if there were significant deficiencies in what happened later on as well. The oral evidence has exposed some of the underlying attitudes, mentality and culture within the Church, which enabled the mistakes to be made.

Dame Moira Gibb said in her report that the Church, at its most senior levels and over many years, supported Peter Ball unwisely and displayed little care for his victims.

That was certainly not putting it too high, and in the light of what we have heard this week, may even have been putting it too low. The evidence shows that the Church's lack of consideration for those who were reported, by themselves or others, to have been abused by Ball was shocking, even callous. Despite the obvious vulnerability of a person such as Neil Todd, their needs seem consistently to have taken second place to a

focus on Ball's situation, and how he could be rehabilitated and supported. It is not even so much that the victims and survivors were disbelieved, at any rate by those who were in a position to see the letters received, and the information to corroborate those complaints. Rather, it is almost as if they were not heard at all – as if what those people said, and what they had experienced, just did not much matter – at any rate so long as it did not lead to public scandal.

The evidence also shows a failure to work co-operatively and to be frank with the police, especially in 1992 and 1993, which is lamentable by any standards, even those of the time.

And it shows that decisions about Peter Ball's return to ministry were driven by Ball's own interests, without consideration or understanding of the gravity of what he had done, or that it amounted to a history and a pattern of abuse, and not to a mere "indiscretion". There was little or no regard for the protection of young people.

There are other, specific points that can be made, and which we shall make in our written submissions.

It is indeed a cause for shame.

It is not for the Archbishops' Council to assign blame to one individual or another. As we have said before, it is important not to allow the blaming of individuals to draw a veil over the Church's collective failure, or to create a false sense that this is all in the past, and there is no need for the change in culture of which I spoke a little earlier. And some of those whose names we have seen and heard this week are dead, some have not given evidence, and some may be hampered by age and lapse of time in accounting for their conduct. We should also remember, as the evidence has shown, that there were people within the Church who spoke out, who supported survivors, and who urged caution about the so-called rehabilitation of Peter Ball – although their voices went mostly unheard.

It may be that those, whose handling of the matter fell short genuinely thought, however misguidedly at times, that what they were doing was right. Certainly one must acknowledge that far greater safeguarding advice, resources and training are available within the Church today. No doubt, also, Peter Ball was an exceptionally skilful manipulator of people and distorter of the truth, and understanding of the way in which relationships of unequal power can be abused, and of the lasting harm caused by certain kinds of abuse, was very probably less developed and widespread then, than it is now.

And yet – it seems to us that it will not do to characterise some of what happened here, especially in the earlier stages of the history, simply as a series of excusable errors of judgment, explained by a different climate of thought, or state of knowledge, at the time. That fundamental indifference to the abused of which I spoke earlier is more culpable than that. No one should ever have thought that that was the way to behave. No one, on the facts that were known at the time, should have thought that Peter Ball could still be described as being "overall . . . a wonderful priest and bishop". No one should ever have thought that Ball had shown real penitence or insight into his offending, let alone that it was safe to allow him to exercise ministry or to go into schools, cloaked with the respectability and authority of the Church, and effectively subject to no oversight save that of his brother, until a risk assessment was eventually carried out.

There may be doubt as to whether Ball would have been prosecuted in 1993 even if the Church had behaved with scrupulous correctness. It cannot be said for sure that Ball committed any further acts of abuse after he was cautioned (although, as you heard earlier this week, it certainly cannot be said confidently that he did not). But the Church has to be judged in this Inquiry on the basis of whether it lived up to the right standards of behaviour. Arguments about causation are no excuse. In any case, and at the very least, there were too many people who were abused by Ball who had to wait far too long for that to be recognised by the Church, and Neil Todd did not live to see that happen. That is to say nothing of, for example, the appalling failure to follow up the questions that had been raised about Vickery House.

Others outside the Church may also have defended Ball, and some of them may have been unwise or worse to do so. But that is no excuse for the Church, and indeed the way in which the Church acted probably encouraged some others to think that Ball had done nothing very wrong.

How could the Church have been guilty of behaving in such a way?

It is hard to say for sure. As well as the lack of understanding of abuse and its consequences, it does seem as though there was an inability to comprehend that a clergyman, especially a senior and respected one, with undoubted gifts to inspire and persuade, could also be capable of wickedness. There was an unwillingness to face up to clear evidence of some of the things he had done, and its implications. There was moral cowardice, even in an institution that should have been in no doubt about the morality which its faith and beliefs dictated. It is a further example of what Archbishop Justin described in March, having read or heard the Chichester evidence, as an:

“extraordinary and atrocious willingness to turn a blind eye to things going very, very seriously wrong, and entirely damaging human beings for their whole lifetimes.”

As you know, the Church before and during this Inquiry has apologised, and apologised again. You also know that the Archbishop of Canterbury said in his evidence in March that:

“apologies are fine, but we have got to find ways of making it different and we have got to do it as quickly as we can . . .”

The safeguarding landscape within the Church has changed in many ways since the events upon which the Inquiry has been mainly focused this week. There are, for example, much better safeguarding policies and training; there has been greater professionalisation and resourcing of safeguarding within the Church; there are better processes around recruitment; and the Church is better at working collaboratively with partners such as the LADO and the police. As the Inquiry knows, further changes are under way, and all Dame Moira Gibb's recommendations have been accepted.

It is evident from the events around Peter Ball, however, that these things are not by themselves enough. Culture and attitudes have to change as well.

Has the Church got better at listening and responding to survivors? We think it has. But it still needs to improve, and commitments to do so were made recently at General Synod. The Church must continue to learn from its mistakes.

Has the culture changed? In some respects yes, but not enough, and not to the same extent in all parts of the Church. If there are those within the Church who still doubt the importance of these issues, they need to reflect upon the grim picture revealed this week about what happens when an institution loses its way in dealing with such cases.

Thank you, Chair.

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