

Statement by Peter M. Hill

I understand that I may be asked to appear as a witness in a dispute within the Methodist Church concerning events involving Rev Peter Timms over the past three years. The following statement is my best recollection of the events in which I was witness or actually involved. It is the truth about such events as I recall them.

I am a retired TV journalist, I worked as a producer. I joined the BBC Current Affairs Group in 1968 and retired from it as a senior programme editor in 1999. Making films is my preferred medium.

I was regarded in BBC TV as one of their best investigative journalists and was, in the late 1970's the Head of the "Newsnight" investigative unit.

The BBC recognised three "divisions" of investigation, each with its own rules and restrictions. They are:

- a) "Consumer investigations" which uncover "sharp practice" by companies or individuals who may dupe members of the public whilst nevertheless staying within the law. It relies on ignorance of consumer and similar law.
- b) "Loopholes in the law" – these investigations consider the wording of statutes and how people may act in a manner intended to deceive and trick people - contrary to the intentions of Parliament when the law was created.
- c) Criminal investigations which deal with people who deliberately break the law.

I tended to work in the second two categories. My research helped create the Child Protection Act, the first statute that dealt with Child pornography. My work also helped create the body which deals with Videopiracy – and later amended the law to incorporate videopiracy as a crime. My work help modify the Model Agency Act in a manner which helped protect young women from abuse. I exposed the financial scandals associated with the National Liberal Club which occurred during the period when Jeremy Thorpe was in charge.

My most well-known work was a series I created - which eventually ran for 25 years – entitled "Rough Justice". This examined and re-researched alleged miscarriages of justice. My research helped reform the system of justice by the creation of the Criminal Case Review Commission. I was asked to lecture the CCRC when it was formed and was invited to join it – an offer I declined because I wished to remain a journalist.

I am a member of the JUSTICE reform Group and also of the British Academy of Forensic Sciences.

My working life has largely been devoted to promoting justice. In 1985 I was named TV journalist of the year and received the Royal Television Society award for outstanding journalism. I have been nominated for the JUSTICE Human Rights Award for my work on criminal cases.

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My relationship with Rev Peter Timms.

I first became aware of Peter Timms and his work in the mid-seventies when he was invited to take part in discussions on the “Tonight” programme – the forerunner of “Newsnight”.

I was an editor on that programme. I recall being impressed by him.

I came across him again some years later when I looked into making a programme about art in prison. Each year BP holds a contest for the “Koestler” award – paintings and sculptures made by prisoners. Peter was in some way connected with this award – I think he was on the committee running it.

I also saw him on TV during this period - for he, as a prison governor, was entrusted with the charge of Myra Hindley, the notorious murderess. His TV appearances were often about her. It was a difficult job which he did admirably.

In the mid-eighties I began giving lectures in the techniques of investigative television. One of my pupils later rang me and asked if I would make a film for a venture he was now in charge of – the Prison Video Magazine. This was, in those days, a VHS video which was shown around prisons. The idea of it was part of the rehabilitation process inside prisons. I made two films for them – both pro bono.

Peter Timms was a member of the committee in charge of the Prison Video Magazine, so I sometimes had lunch with him in their Camden offices – along with Terry Waite and Ann Owers the then Head of Prisons, whom I knew from my membership of JUSTICE.

From this re-acquaintance sprang a much close relationship with Peter. He became a member of the committee that organised seminars in miscarriages of justice. I had initiated this project, and ran it in cooperation with Grays Inn.

I later joined Peter as a trustee of the Loudoun Trust – set up by Richard Astor. This is a think tank dealing with Child Sex Abuse. Peter became the Chairman of this Trust when Richard Astor moved to South Africa. Because of my journalistic skills, I became the person in charge of all Trust publications and am now the Secretary of the Trust.

And that is how I became involved in the affairs of the Methodist Church.

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In 2016 the Loudoun Trust was concerned with a project which we loosely called “suggestibility”. I quote from the minutes of April 28th of that year.

“The meeting then turned to other matters, and to one in particular, our work with Swansea University on reliability assessments of the evidence of young children in cases of child sex abuse. A paper from Kim Drake, senior lecturer at the university was produced. In short, they would require some £60,000 to produce results on this over the next three years. We had emphasised to Professor Mark Blagrove who would be in overall charge of the work, that the aim of the exercise would be to produce a system firmly based in Science and which would be admissible in a court of law.”

Peter Timms and I were very closely involved in this project. We had visited Swansea to discuss it further. I had worked with the late James McKeith, and with Professor Gisli Gudjonsson. In the eighties they had developed a system of psycho-analysis that had been accepted in the courts as determining whether or not a confession in custody might be false or not.

Peter had also been a friend of James McKeith, who was the chief psychiatrist in the South East region.

Together, Peter and I had considered that the system developed by McKeith and Gudjonsson – generally known as the ‘science of suggestibility’ – might be adapted to deal with the most difficult aspect of child sex abuse cases. the reliability of the evidence of children, particularly those below the age of seven.

We had discussed such “reliability scales” with one of Gudjonsson’s pupils – Kim Drake at Swansea.

This project is still on-going, but Peter’s involvement in the Methodist controversy has seriously hampered his money-raising. It has also affected his health.

In September 2016 I had driven to Bexhill to discuss the latest moves in this Loudoun “suggestibility” initiative with Peter. I was in his house when a letter arrived.

Peter had not been enjoying the best of health in this period – this was why I had made the journey from London.

Peter was in an armchair, with various papers and books around him. I sat on a settee across the room – it was sideways to his chair.

At some stage whilst we talked, a letter came through the door. I presume Peter must have gone for it – but I was not concentrating on him, for I was reading something. But Peter, sitting in his chair said something that drew my attention – something like “ Oh dear,” or some such.

I looked up. He was sitting in his chair. I saw that his face was pale. I was worried about his health and went across to him, moving towards the back of his chair, this being the only way of approaching him. A letter was on his lap – one hand was on it. Peter said nothing, but I briefly read the opening, thinking at that time that it was announcing someone’s death, for such was the kind of reaction he had had to the letter.

In fact the letter was the “false confession” sent by Mr. Chris Kitchin - the document which has figured so prominently in the arguments of the past three years.

I asked Peter what this was all about. He was reluctant to answer me, but I said forcefully “You must not sign this”. At that time I knew nothing of what had occurred inside the Church which had led to this document being sent, but I knew from experience in miscarriage of justice investigations that one should never sign such a document as a matter of principle.

I had played a leading role in uncovering the abuses of justice resulting from police coercion to obtain supposed confessions to serious crimes during the eighties. I knew that unassuming people such as Peter Timms were vulnerable to such abuse. I have made one film specifically on the subject of suggestibility; it is the only one ever made.

At that time I knew nothing of the rules on confidentiality imposed by the Methodist Church in matters concerning complaints. Peter explained such rules to me a few minutes later – and I naturally agreed to keep his confidence in the matter. However, I also offered to help him in any way I could.

At that time Peter was largely computer-illiterate. I offered to file all his documents for him and to write out his letters for him. Although he had a printer, he did not know how to use it to print from his small tablet computer.

At that time I had no idea that I would still be doing this job some three years later. I knew Peter very well as a man of the highest integrity and I was amazed that anyone would have the temerity or the audacity to say things about him and treat him in such a disrespectful manner such as I witnessed. I became convinced that justice was not being granted to him by the Church and this increased my determination to help him as much as I could.

Peter was taken into hospital twice in the following months - October and November 2016. As a consequence, I became more involved in the matter, for he asked me to visit Methodist Church House to see Rev Alan Bolton in an effort to bring an end to the matter.

The more I learned of the persecution of my friend, the more appalled I became at the conduct of various members of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. If I had still been working on "Panorama" or "Newsnight" I would have presented the evidence to my editor and conducted a serious investigation into the roots of the evil that I perceived was at the heart of the Church.

The Methodist Church is established by Act of Parliament. It therefore has a responsibility to act in accordance with that Act. I did not think that the case of Peter Timms came anywhere near to the ethical doctrines of the Church which would have been presented to Parliament.

Even whilst the matter was still being investigated – for example at the time of my visits to Methodist Church House – I had begun to take notes which might guide me in any future investigation that might be filmed. As I stated above, film is my preferred medium and I control a small film unit.

By the time that the report of the connexional panel of inquiry came out – in January 2017, I had enough information to make such an investigative programme. I had mentioned this idea to Peter several times – but he had always rejected the idea of a film.

By the Spring of 2017 I had a firm conviction that the population of the United Kingdom should be made aware of what I considered to be the corrupt practices of the Methodist Church. People are being persuaded to join the church and to make financial contributions towards the running of the Church. They take part and pay that money because they believe in the integrity and ethical standards that the Church promotes. But they are being duped by persons in

authority within the church who care little or nothing for justice, truth and openness and are willing to persecute an octogenarian in order to cover up their own misdeeds. This is nothing short of corruption.

In the early part of 2017, as more and more misdemeanours came to light in the manner in which Peter was being treated, I kept putting this argument to him and stressing that he must go public on the subject. He always declined my approaches in this.

No one in Methodist Church House would listen to Peter, so I suggested that at the very least he should inform the most senior persons of eminence in the Church. He tried to speak with the President, a lady called Lorraine Mellor (I am unsure of this name) but he was rebuffed.

He had often spoken to me about Clifford Bellamy who had written guidelines to the church's standing orders. Peter approached him, but Clifford Bellamy said that he could not help.

In order to aid Peter's approach to Bellamy, I had written a lengthy report on the matter, culled from the material I had typed for Peter and my own notes. I now suggested that if Bellamy could not help, perhaps others, just as senior as he, might.

Peter objected to this idea because, he said, the area of confidentiality might be broken if a dozen senior eminent persons or so knew of what had happened. They might gossip.

During this period I telephoned Peter almost every morning. We discussed not only the Methodist affair, but also a set of principles that we were compiling for the Loudoun Trust – dealing with the basis on which future government policy on mandatory reporting of suspicions of child sex abuse. This was for presentation to the Home Office, which had instigated a review of that subject and asked the Loudoun Trust to respond.

I was researching material for this Loudoun project when I came across the case of Sammy Woodhouse. The reports I read exposed the sexual abuse that this young woman and many other children had experienced in Rotherham. This was relevant to one of the Loudoun principles that Peter and I were discussing. It was particularly pertinent to the difficulties that Muslim women have, in places such as Rotherham, in reporting any suspicions of child sex abuse they have concerning their husbands – or even their children. I wondered if we might find and film an interview such a Muslim woman.

I rang some of my contacts in the BBC and was told that a young radio reporter called Alex Strangways-Booth might be useful. She had a wide brief, but tended to concentrate on stories about religious

matters. She might know some Muslim women who might discuss the matter.

I looked up Alex Strangeways-Booth and discovered that she had transmitted a lot of material on the review on abuse that the Methodist Church had commissioned some three years before. I knew little of this.

I was surprised to read that the Church had actually announced in a press release that it wanted to be open about the past and to have stronger safeguarding procedures in the future. This seemed to suggest that the Church had not been open about this abuse in the past.

The story was appalling and yet, it seemed, the facts had been covered-up by the Church. Cover-ups are major targets for investigative TV producers, for their work always involves an implicit responsibility to publish matters that are in the public interest.

Allegations of sexual abuse had formed the largest number of cases in the Methodist Church scandal. In total, the Methodist Church had identified 1,885 cases - with reported abuse including alleged sexual, physical, emotional and domestic abuse, as well as cases of neglect. All this had been covered-up. There was clearly a culture of cover-up in the Methodist Church.

The chair of the subsequent review, Jane Stacey, called for a culture change in the Church. She said in the report that ministers of religion were in an "almost unique position of trust" at "very vulnerable times" in people's lives. She called for "more robust accountability structures".

She added: "I think society at large needs to understand there is a lot more abuse but also areas of concern than people ever thought - and the Church is no exception."

The Methodist Church announced that it wanted to be open about the past and to have stronger safeguarding procedures in the future.

The matter, it said was "deeply regrettable". The church had "*not always listened properly to those abused*".

Dr. Martyn Atkins stated "*In respect of these things we have, as a Christian church, clearly failed to live in ways that glorify God and honour Christ.*"

Nichola Marshall, the head of the international abuse department at the law firm Leigh Day, which had been involved, stated

“It must never again be the case that the reputation of institutions take precedence over the welfare of society’s most vulnerable. Faith-based organisations have a huge responsibility to ensure the trust they demand of followers is not misused by those who seek out positions of responsibility to prey on the vulnerable.”

David Greenwood chairman of the Stop Church Child Abuse campaign stated:

“This has amounted to systematic covering up of allegations of abuse of children and vulnerable adults.”

Alex Strangeways-Booth reported that the cases examined were only those documented in the past, adding that many would not have been recorded. Her article summarised by stating *“We will never know how many cases have not been handled properly.”*

This article, which I estimate I first came across in April 2017, stunned me. I talked to Peter about it. It seemed that the Methodist Church had been covering-up this scandal for perhaps thirty years. I pointed out to Peter that the leader of the review, Jane Stacy, had pointed to the Church’s poor accountability structures and wanted the introduction of more robust structures to bring such matters to light.

I was appalled by phrases such as *“systematic covering up of allegations”*

and that the Church has a *“responsibility to ensure... the trust they demand of followers is not misused”*

Above all there was the humiliating admission that *“we have... clearly failed to live in ways that glorify God”*

Why, I asked Peter, had he not told me of all of this – for he was a person, vulnerable with age, who had been abused and against whom a cover-up had been created. He had lived all his life in ways to glorify God, but the Methodist Church had not done so when it dealt with him.

His case was a clear example of how the *“reputation of institutions take precedence over the welfare of society’s most vulnerable”* about which a senior lawyer in the sex-abuse inquiry had been so scathing.

I recalled that when I had gone to see Rev Alan Bolton and told him about the “false confession”, he had told me there was nothing he could do. I had thought at the time that this was not a particularly “robust” response to what I was telling him.

The ability of the Methodist Church to cover up misdemeanours was obviously a matter of public interest. Indeed, the leader of the sex-abuse review, had said that “*society at large*” needed to know more about the abuse in the Church.

The consequence of this corporate cover-up was that almost two thousand young women and children had suffered sex abuse. The Church either did not know the truth, did not care to know the truth – or had even covered-up the truth in order to protect its image.

This was clearly quite contrary to the central doctrines of the Methodist Church.

I realised that exactly the same kind of cover-up was happening with Peter Timms.

Indeed, I wondered how many other ministers and lay persons in the Methodist Church had suffered from the abuse of the complaints system that I had witnessed.

I explained to Peter that this information put me in a very difficult position. The discussion that followed was, to say the least, robust.

The Loudoun Trust had already discussed the possibility that there was a serious cover-up going on inside Muslim mosques about child sex abuse. The suspicion was that Muslim religious leaders were pressurising Muslim women into staying silent – on threat of being expelled from the Mosque and even ostracised in Muslim society. But the Mosques had imposed a cover-up on the affair.

However, I also now knew that the Methodist Church had had some two years to “*introduce more robust accountability structures*” to rid itself of a similar culture of cover-up. And it had failed to do so.

On the evidence I had seen regarding the attitude towards the false confession sent to Peter, and the coercion that had gone with it, there had been no improvement in the Methodist Church’s desire to obey its own standing orders concerning openness. It had not reformed its mis-guided ways. Its opportunity to instigate reforms had been not been taken.

The culture of the corporate cover-up was still in place.

It seemed clear to me that this culture of cover-up was a matter of general public interest – and if not that, then at least it must be a matter of interest to all persons in the Methodist Church and particularly those people who constitute the Conference of the Methodist Church.

I told Peter that if I did not do something about this I would be failing in my responsibilities as a journalist and that my reputation would suffer as a consequence.

I was keen to expose the hypocrisy that this affair demonstrated in the Methodist Church. Peter, with his usual forgiving and self-effacing attitude, begged me to do nothing. He believed that the Church would, when it learned the truth, do the right thing. I replied that if it did not know the truth of the “false confession” by now, it never would. We were beginning to have different ends, indeed professional responsibilities, in this matter.

It was at this point – I think sometime in May 2017 – that I presented Peter with a further argument – one that I had encountered several times in my investigative work.

This argument was very much in my mind at the time. I had had first-hand experience of the legal background to non-disclosure agreements. I knew a lot about the case of Jeffrey Wigand who became nationally known in the USA as a whistleblower. I had seen that S.O. 1104 is a non-disclosure agreement.

In 1996 Wigand appeared on the CBS news program 60 Minutes, a programme I very much admired and respected. He stated that a tobacco company, Brown & Williamson, had intentionally manipulated its tobacco blend with chemicals such as ammonia to increase the effect of nicotine in cigarette smoke.

A friend of mind, Tom Mangold, made a “Panorama” about this case. I became involved, as a senior editor, in an internal controversy about it. The BBC had a contract with a company that supplied KLM airlines with our programmes. There is a rule inside the BBC that current affairs programmes cannot be edited by any such outside company. In this case however, the company involved wished to “neuter” the film altogether – even though it had the BBC brand on it. Their reason for wanting to do this was that one of their main advertisers in the airline magazine was a tobacco company.

I was involved in the adjudication on this. I pointed out that the Wigand affair in the States was causing a revolution about whistle blowers; the law was on the point of being changed and it would look crass for the BBC to be seen to be taking sides against what was basically a restriction of free speech, and therefore the first amendment of the US constitution – in a nation where many of these planes landed.

“Neutering” the film would also seriously affect the professional reputation of one of our top reporters – Tom Mangold.

The BBC lawyers then came up with the convincing argument. By injecting ammonia into the cigarettes, the tobacco company was actually committing a crime – and, said the lawyers, a non-disclosure agreement cannot be enforced when the motive for doing so is to cover up a crime committed by the company.

We withdrew the film from our contract on the grounds that to do as KLM wished would cover up, or condone, a criminal act.

I pointed out to Peter that his situation with the Methodist Church was analogous. I told him that it was clear that the non-disclosure agreement, as written in SO 1104, could not be used *if the motive for imposing or upholding the confidentiality was to cover up a misdemeanour committed by the church.*

In such circumstances, if nothing else, the enforcement of such a non-disclosure clause was a flagrant breach of the guiding principle as written out in SO 1100.

Peter was, I argued, caught in a trap. If he continued to refrain from informing the most senior members of the Methodist Church of the misdemeanour that had occurred, he would be as guilty as the miscreants, in covering up that misdemeanour. Further, if he did not tell the truth, he was guilty of a breach of SO 1100.

I was in a similar trap. If I went public with the truth, I betrayed my friend. If I did not, I betrayed the professional ethics of journalism.

I also pointed out that SO 1100 makes it clear that we are each responsible for our own actions. I argued that the only answer to this quandary was to go public with the facts. I told him that if he did not “go public” in some form, I would have to do so. I would use the Bellamy report to do that.

I said that whether he liked it or not, I was going to tell someone else about this – probably Alex Strangways-Booth – or Martin Bashir the Religions Editor in BBC TV. This would be to protect myself from criticism.

Peter begged me not to do this – citing the rules on confidentiality in the complaints system. I asked him what was the limit of this non-disclosure clause? He knew of no such limit in the system. I asked if it ended when any inquiry reported. He did not know.

We both knew however that the final report by Chris Kitchin, overprinted on every page with the word CONFIDENTIAL, was already known about by the District Chair and the various persons close to him in the Hastings Rye and Bexhill circuit. So where was the confidentiality in terms of the number of people who might read the

report? The word was already out in Bexhill that Peter had been found against by the inquiry. Perhaps people had not seen the document itself – but they knew about the contents.

The truth was, of course, that because of the non-disclosure agreement in SO 1104, Peter had been effectively found guilty in secret session. He was guilty – but no one was to know why and how.

Peter sent a letter to someone in Church House asking about the limits of the confidentiality on such a matter. As far as I know there was no reply. There seem to be no rules in the Methodist Church which are in any way equivalent to the journalists' ethical guidelines of the BBC .

In discussion about this, I remember remarking that such a matter would surely not be secret until the end of time. There had to be a limit – there also must be some circumstances in which such secrecy was lifted. Surely a corrupt cover-up was one such circumstance?

I told him about the Clive Ponting case in the mid-eighties when the jury at Ponting's trial had supported his breach of the official secrets act on the grounds of it having been in the public interest to leak the information that he did. I thought he "had to do a Ponting".

In the end I lost patience with Peter and, thinking largely of protecting myself and my own reputation, I told him that I would publish the same report I had prepared for Clifford Bellamy – but, as a concession to him, I would distribute it only to a limited number of very senior members of the Methodist Church. I would do this by putting it on the internet and giving such persons the address of the site. I hoped that Peter would take some positive decision when confronted with this, for it satisfied some of the principles that he had expounded to me over the previous few months.

I added that I expected these senior members of the Church to act with honour and integrity – and to do something about it. If they did not, then I would either go to one of my journalistic contacts with the story or distribute the report further.

In fact, because of Peter's pleading, I never did tell any other journalist about this. Peter was so chagrined at my attitude, and in total despair, even terror, that I simply relented and increased the distribution among members of the Church. I emailed eminent senior members of the Church with the internet address, so that they could learn the truth.

Over the next few months I gave the internet address to an ever- wider circle of senior Methodists. During this period, Peter's District Chair,

Rev John Hellyer suspended him from all church activities. This appalled me.

These included: Mr. David Booth, Mr. Graham Danbury ,Rev. Mr. David L Gibson, Mrs Nwabueze Nwokolo, Mr. Richard Price, Mr. Keith E Reed, Professor Diane Rowland, Mr. Joseph Anoom, Mr. John Birtwell.

None of these clearly eminent people took any action that I am aware of. They seemed to condone the cover up. To say the least, I was surprised. It confirmed my view that there was a corporate culture of cover-up.

This continued for some months. Peter Timms was told several times that nothing could be done – and he was also suspended from all church activities. In the autumn, Peter was finally offered a meeting with his District Chair in Crawley. I attended this meeting.

Peter had told me that the meeting was to discuss peace terms. In fact Rev John Hellyer launched into a critique of the “Bellamy report” which I had placed on the internet. He claimed it had false assumptions and inaccuracies. His evidence for these accusations was flimsy.

When Peter, and then I, tried to introduce the evidence of the false confession, John Hellyer would not even touch the document, never mind read it. I read out the most important paragraph, but he took no notice. The meeting ended in uproar. Rev Deborah Cornish was present and can no doubt give her account of this meeting – she, to give her due consideration, actually read the false confession. But she said nothing about it.

How, I wondered, could intelligent and responsible people behave like this?

After this meeting Peter was severely shaken and was speaking in complete despair. During his rambling talk, he mentioned to me that I had originally suggested that I should make a film about this problem. He had rejected all thought about such a project at the time, but now he wondered how it might be done.

After all the moaning from Peter that I had endured since I put the report on the internet, this was something of a surprise – but after the attitude of John Hellyer perhaps it should not have been. Nevertheless I did not wish to raise again all the objections that Peter had peppered me with against the internet report, so I said I would consider it and over the next few days worked out the type of format that might suit in the circumstances.

A few weeks later we had a discussion over lunch at which we agreed that we would, to some extent, go our separate ways in this affair, for we were showing signs of having different objectives for our actions in it.

As for the content of the film, I could see no reason why Peter's feelings should remain confidential or secret. One could read the pain in his face. And the matter of the *suspension* was not, I considered, covered by any non-disclosure agreement. Members of the Methodist Church in Bexhill, such as Rev Ian Pruden and chief circuit steward John Troughton had made it clear to all that Peter was banned from all church activities. It was common knowledge in Bexhill that Peter was barred from all church activities.

Furthermore, there was some evidence of "surveillance action" taken by persons in Bexhill in an effort to influence and prejudice the inquiry – contrary to standing orders. These were also not covered by the rule on confidentiality.

I already possessed the documentation on the main elements of the corrupt investigation that Chris Kitchin had conducted. I therefore outlined a scenario to Peter for a film in which he would only appear to give vent to his feelings, whilst I, in commentary, would outline what the Methodist Church had done to him.

I told him that if he did not appear in the film he would give the impression that he was unwilling to do so and that this would undermine the arguments in my commentary. But he was to speak only of his feelings and the effects of the suspension.

I made it very clear to him that the film was *my project*. He would have no editorial control over it whatsoever.

Peter respected my professional responsibilities in this and agreed. We filmed an interview with him on my premises in Bexhill in November 2017; that, and a few exterior shots of him, was his sole contribution.

The main emphasis of the film was that he was the victim of terrible treatment by the Church that he had served all his life. I wrote commentary covering the events – and asked him for his reactions. He recounted how badly he felt about his treatment, how bemused he was by the trickery used against him and by the intransigence of the Church.

His contributions were all about his *reactions* to the terrible incidents that had befallen him. It was akin to interviewing the survivor of a plane crash – the questions in such circumstances are "how do you

feel? Where does it hurt? ” – not “what went wrong the plane that caused the crash?”

This then was not a breach by Peter of SO 1104 – even though such a breach would have been justified.

It might be argued of course that if Peter had not released the confidential information to me in the first place I would not have been able to use it for the film. However, he had trusted me – and I had betrayed him.

The reason for this is that we have different roles in life and the requirements of our different roles had clashed.

I considered that I had a duty to tell the public of the cover-up that was going on, particularly after the sex abuse scandal. Peter had a duty to try to keep the cover-up intact because of the consequent damage of publication to the Methodist Church. He still, incredibly, believed that the Church would “do the right thing” in the end. He kept using that phrase to me. I had long ago given up expecting that.

It is true that I had given my word to keep his confidence when I took on the job of secretary – and *I broke that promise*. But that promise had been given when I did not realise that the Church had not reformed itself after the abuse scandal. The context of my giving that promise had therefore changed. There was a greater good to consider. My professional responsibilities as a journalist placed upon me a duty to the truth - and to the public interest.

In fact, I broke my word to him for what I considered to be the best of reasons – the defence of the Methodist Church against the corporate and corrupt culture of cover-up which I had witnessed within it.

The film was finished in rough cut by Christmas 2017 – and I was then taken ill with influenza. I had given a copy of the edit to a friend to get his general view of it from a technical point of view. I had encountered some problems with format conversion. I know that he had connections on the South coast – and I suspect that it was through this that a “pirate” version of the film appeared in early January 2018. I eventually found one of these pirated versions and saw that it contained material which I had edited out of the film after I had recovered my health in the New Year.

I am of the opinion, though I have no proof of such, that it was this pirated version which triggered the many emails sent around Bexhill which cause such a fuss.

Of one aspect of this I am certain however, - Peter Timms had no hand in any of this at all.

I began circulating the film by post in mid-January 2018. I had 200 copies of it, but I only ever circulated perhaps 50 or 60 of them. I placed copies in the many charity shops in Bexhill and also at a jumble sale organised in the Sackville road church, Peter's Church.

I distributed copies to the persons involved in the dispute – though I had not named anyone involved in my commentary. This was not for reasons of defamation – but out of simple courtesy. I also posted some to senior members of the Church.

In February 2018 the chief circuit steward John Troughton began issuing grievances against Peter accusing him, among many things, of criminal acts. He was later to accuse me of a criminal act.

Peter told me to stop circulating copies of the DVD – but, as I said to him, it was impossible to withdraw them from circulation for I had no idea who had seen them and picked them up. No doubt, some thirty or so copies were circulating all around Bexhill. In any case, I had invested a lot of money in the project and was not ready to pull the plug on it, for I could suffer a serious loss to my professional reputation.

John Troughton's grievances increased – I think there were three in all; they were all based on assumptions. He criticised my film on the grounds that it contained "false assumptions" - and yet his grievance was entirely based on false assumptions.

However, at a reconciliation meeting with John Troughton in March 2018, Peter Timms agreed to ask me again to stop distribution of the DVD – and to take down the Bellamy report from the internet. This obligation on him was a central part of the reconciliation agreement with John Troughton.

I asked Peter if it meant that the Church was finally seeing sense about the false confession. He told me that the national argument would go on.

I pointed out that the film was not about the local argument with John Troughton or the other ministers – but about the treatment meted out to Peter by Chris Kitchin. He acknowledged the discrepancy, but pleaded with me to do as he asked. He hoped that if I did that, Methodist Church House would take it as an olive branch and agree to discuss peace terms. By now I regarded this optimism in his approach to be little more than delusional.

Nevertheless, as an act of friendship, I took the Bellamy report down from the internet and ceased all distribution of the DVD. I actually burned the hundred and fifty or so spare copies I had of the film.

Within a few weeks John Troughton had reversed his position. He claimed that the DVDs were still circulating in Bexhill. No doubt there were still some copies around – but I had no way of finding them or recalling them. And Peter told me that there was nothing in the reconciliation agreement about finding all the copies that were in Bexhill.

Peter had thought that when I agreed to comply with his wishes, the suspension would be lifted. It was not – and John Troughton renewed his attack on Peter. It was this attack which has led to the current disciplinary proceedings.

This remarkable action was very revealing. It was quite clear now what the objective of the suspension was. Troughton, through his grievances, had achieved everything he had demanded – yet the suspension remained.

The true motive of the suspension, and indeed the grievances, was surely now revealed. It was to silence Peter in his objection to the false confession and all the iniquities that had followed it – in effect it was an attempt to shore up the cover-up that had been going on. If he would not voluntarily shut up – they would force him to do so.

I was extremely angry about this and immediately put the Bellamy report back on the internet. I did not distribute any further DVDs of the film – for I had burned my stock of them. However, I set about creating a new website called “The Methodist Way” in which was incorporated the film – amended in this second edit to include the names of the Methodist Church officials involved.

In November 2018 I accompanied Peter to a meeting in Methodist Church House which again was supposed to be about peace talks to settle the whole affair.

A couple of days before this meeting, the matter of the false confession was struck from the agenda and, I gather, for I was not present, that only the suspension was discussed.

Again, the quid pro quo for lifting the suspension was that I cease activities. Even then, the only concession in this was that Peter could *discuss* the lifting of the suspension with John Hellyer. There was no *commitment* even on that – and the meeting never took place.

The corrupt report by Kitchin was to remain - Peter was to accept its findings. This again pointed to the true motivation of the suspension – it was coercion to force Peter to accept the false confession as being legitimate.

This was way beyond the pale for me. I was furious that the Church could treat Peter like that. When he asked me afterwards (in tears) to take the website and the film down from the internet, I flatly refused. I had done it once, at some cost, I was not going to do it again.

Worse, they were torturing Peter in order to make me take the report and the film down from the internet.

I felt very strongly about this - particularly because the events supported my main line of argument. The Methodist Church was covering up its misdemeanours in just the same way as it had covered up the scandal of sex abuse by its ministers. The next day I actually rang the office of Martin Bashir – but he was out of the country.

We are now almost a year on from that meeting – and Peter has largely given up asking me to change my position. I have not yet leaked the story to any of my contacts – mainly because I know that they would wish to interview Peter and his health is probably not up to that.

On Sunday 26th September this year I attended a meeting with Peter in Bexhill. He asked me several questions.

The first question was whether I considered that he had had any hand in the writing, the publishing or in any way, the Bellamy report and the film that I made.

I can say that I am responsible entirely for the format, the shooting, the editing, the script and commentary and the distribution of the film. No one else was involved in the making of this project. As for the Bellamy report, he had had no hand in writing or preparing it – and I placed in on the internet without his knowledge, though he knew that it was a possibility, because we had agreed that its circulation would be restricted solely to Clifford Bellamy.

Indeed, I did not seek or wish for any involvement by Peter in these matters. Peter’s somewhat plaintive and overly “kind”, self-effacing style of writing is quite contrary to my direct approach. In making films it is essential, for legal reasons, to “call a spade a spade.” Even if Peter had wanted to have a hand in writing the commentary, I would not have allowed him to interfere.

The simple fact is that Peter Timms does not have the ability to make such a film, and he has no idea how to place material on the internet. His influence has been solely confined to the distribution – his continual pleading for me to restrict the distribution of the film to as little as possible – in the hope that someone in the Church would “do the right thing”. Fat chance, I thought.

This desire for drastic limitation in distribution of the film has had an effect on its impact. It has ruined the general effect of the film as I saw it. And of course, I surmised that Peter begged and pleaded with me to cease distribution of the film because he was being threatened and coerced by the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

What a pitiful situation we had both been brought to.

Such 'giving in to threats' is against all my principles as a journalist, but I have gone along with Peter's wishes to some extent because of our long friendship and because I have a deep respect for him.

Without Peter's influence, I would have made a much "harder" film, with a much wider distribution.

To a certain extent, I believe that Peter has become a part of the corporate cover-up. And he has dragged me down into a position of being partially complicit in this terrible circumstance.

At the meeting of September 2019 Peter asked me whether my efforts had any intention to undermine and damage John Troughton personally and in his position as Circuit Steward in the circuit. I replied in the affirmative.

Not only has Troughton defamed my friend by accusing him of criminal acts, but he has defamed me too - by claimed that I am capable of acting in a criminal fashion. I do not like the man, but I have offered to talk the matter out with him over a drink in a local pub – he has rejected all my peace offers. In my opinion he is unworthy of holding any position in the Methodist Church. He should certainly not be a chief circuit steward, a job which requires wisdom and reliable judgment.

Shame on the Methodist Church for placing him in a position of trust over other church members in Bexhill. He is a mindless and sanctimonious gossip-monger who only acts in his own selfish interests.

Personally, I have no time for any man who will threaten physical violence against an octogenarian such as Peter Timms – simply because he does not agree with the views he is expressing. But that is what John Troughton did at the circuit meeting of 2014. This is not the Methodist Way and Troughton should be told so. My source for that allegation is not Peter Timms, but another senior local person who would like to see Troughton thrown out of the Church.

My original film however, did *not attack John Troughton*. It did not even mention him as I recall. When he went back on his word in April 2018 I then inserted on the Methodist Way website several small

updates about him. This was after he caused me financial losses when he reneged on the reconciliation agreement in April 2018 in an effort to maintain the corrupt corporate cover-up in the Methodist Church – and when he accused me of criminal behaviour.

The second version of the film which I placed on the “Methodist Way” website was the version in which I first “named names” – something I had carefully avoided in my original film. The Church can thank Troughton for that development. The incident is a good example of how he lacks the wisdom, judgement and good sense to be a reliable officer of the Church. He is a danger to the Church.

Peter also asked me if I had gossiped with anyone around Bexhill about the case. I said that I had not. I know very few people in Bexhill. However, I am aware of a body of Methodists who are opposed to John Troughton’s presence in the Methodist Church.

Peter asked to me to outline for him how I had distributed copies of my film around the circuit – what had been the limits. I replied that I had posted some – perhaps twenty - to senior members of the church. But locally, I had only distributed copies as outlined above – in charity shops and such, where I knew local Methodists shopped.

Occasionally I copy one off for someone – I can copy DVDs on my computer – but I have ceased general distribution of DVDs. Minimum orders for copies are usually around 200. I did not re-start physical distribution after John Troughton’s breach of his word. Instead I concentrated on the new website. Based in the USA, it has worldwide distribution and is protected by the First Amendment.

Peter asked me to specify my motives in distributing the film. My motives are explained in detail above. I repeated them to him and then determined to write this statement, for I fear he may need it.

Of the established churches in our nation, I am closest to the Methodist Church – I was brought up in it. I hold to the ethical standards of the Methodist Church with its lack of pomposity and show which one finds in other churches.

As mentioned in my film, the Methodist Church is one of the most important institutions ever created by the people of Great Britain. It has brought peace and wisdom to people all over the world. It is a major force for peace. I wish it to act properly – with honour, justice and with a love of the truth. I feel sure that all right-minded persons in our nation feel the same way.

My initial motive in helping Peter was simply to help an old friend, whom I admire greatly, in his travails with the Church. My aims have changed – they are greater than that. The event of discovering the

cover-up of the sex abuse cases was really the tipping point. There can be no cover-ups in the Methodist Church. And yet, there are.

In June of this year (2019) a Commons Select Committee published a report containing its views on non-disclosure agreements. It repeated the kind of argument that the BBC lawyers had used in the Wigand case mentioned above. I sent a letter to Donna Ely in which I *reinterpreted* the relevant comments in the report as they applied to the Methodist Church. I wrote:

“It is hard to understand on what basis it could ever be deemed to be in the public interest for the Methodist Church to use legal agreements, often drawn up by professionally qualified lawyers, to cover up allegations of behaviour contrary to the constitutional provisions of the Church committed in the organization of the Church”.

and:

“We are particularly concerned that some members of the executive of the Methodist Church are using an NDA (non- disclosure agreement) to avoid investigating unlawful discrimination and harassment complaints and holding perpetrators to account”.

This is the core of my position against the Methodist Church at the moment. What was done to Peter Timms during the connexional inquiry was wrong, very wrong. Yet no one cared. What occurred when he objected to the treatment he had received was a reprehensible cover-up of the worst kind.

Worse, it was against all the sanctimonious proclamations that Church officials made about cover-ups after the sex abuse scandal was exposed. These proclamations of innocence or reform were made at the same time as the Church was covering-up a connexional panel’s mistake in sending the “false confession” to Peter Timms.

To explain my position further, I should add that as a journalist, if I challenge in public the hypocrisy of one of the nation’s established churches, I may, on principle, only cease doing so if and when I can justify my actions to the general public, and my peers. For that, I would need to show that the Methodist Church has ceased such negligent practices and no longer deserves such criticism.

I believe that Peter is now to appear before a disciplinary panel of inquiry for something that I am wholly responsible for. The only rationale in complaining or punishing Peter for his involvement is clearly to coerce *me* into stopping my journalistic enterprise. This is a kind of blackmail and coercion that is surely contrary to SO 1100.

It is akin to a burglar torturing a man's wife so that he will hand over the safe keys. We have all seen the films – it is always the bad guys who do that. So who are the bad guys here?

In the light of the above, please consider the two possible outcomes of such an inquiry.

If Peter is found guilty, will I take down the material on the internet? Not at all, in fact I will increase it to include the ignominy of the actions against him. I shall increase the “footfall” of the website.

If the case against him is dismissed, will I take down the material? Not at all, for the corruption in the Church must end – or be exposed to the general public. The culture of the cover-up must be ended. Free of the restraint of Peter's pleadings, I shall increase the amount of material on the internet.

I see no purpose in the action the Church is taking against my friend.

The Methodist Church has made Peter Timms a victim, whilst I consider that his stance against injustice makes him a hero.

The general public and particularly members of the Methodist Church, should know what is going on.

Just as Jane Stacey some five years ago, I call for a culture change in the Methodist Church and more robust accountability structures to ensure that all in the church are treated fairly and given the respect that they deserve.

I point out that I assert all rights in the format and content of this statement. The content of this statement is not to be changed or amended without prior permission in writing from me. The Methodist Church of Great Britain has no legal rights in either changing it or restricting its publication.

Signed

Peter M. Hill

Dated:.....

