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Headline Church accused of 'not listening'

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Abstract

Story

A FORMER government adviser on childcare has accused the Children's Minister, Margaret Hodge, and the Solicitor-General, Harriet Harman, of ignoring concerns she raised three years ago about the much criticised paediatrician Professor Sir Roy Meadow.

Jan Loxley has also declared the Church of England guilty of "incompetence and ineptitude" for "refusing to listen to concerns about an issue which has devastated so many lives".

Mrs Loxley, who was falsely suspected of abusing her son, wrote an account of her experiences in the Church Times last year (Comment, 21 February 2003), after the Court of Appeal found Sally Clarke innocent of the murder of her two sons.

After the announcement last week that there would be a government review of 5000 cases of children removed from their families, and a further 238 criminal cases involving Professor Meadow's diagnoses of Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP), Mrs Loxley informed The Sunday Times that she had written to both ministers on 17 May 2000, urging them to take seriously the issue of the wrongful removal of children.

At the same time, Mrs Loxley said this week, she wrote to several senior members of the church hierarchy, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the Bishops of London, Oxford, and Bath & Wells, about false, mistaken and malicious accusations of child abuse.

Some had "gone cold" after initial positive and sympathetic responses; others had ignored the letter or had briefed against her, Mrs Loxley said. Two bishops had been "hurtfully dismissive" of her personal trauma, backing the "professional credibility" of church-school headteachers. Another had indicated that he preferred to get information from church sources rather than personal contact. Only the Bishop of Bradwell, the Rt Revd Laurie Green, had been supportive.

Mrs Loxley said on Wednesday that she believed the reason she had been ignored or dismissed by the Church was because her reputation had been tainted by information her parish priest had sent to the Bishop of Edmonton.

"I wanted the bishops to be aware of what was happening, and to look at an issue that was affecting family life for thousands of families in this country. I wanted them to look and hold the Government to account, which is surely the Church's proper theological role," she said. "But they didn't — they listened only to the Meadow argument, which I believe they got through the Children's Society."

Malcolm Blount, Mrs Loxley's husband, said on Wednesday that he believed the

Church had been “running scared” on child protection issues.

“The Church felt it must be whiter than white on child protection matters. This seems to have prevented it from speaking out on the issues raised by the MSBP cases, for fear that they were participating in some kind of cover-up or self-justification,” he said. The fact that bishops in the House of Lords divided things into portfolios might also, paradoxically, have prevented any one bishop from taking action, said Mr Blount.

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