

# BIAS AND BIGOTRY AT THE BBC — PART I

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*This is Part I of a two part series; the June Catalyst will feature Part II. These articles represent an abbreviated version of Donohue's monograph, "BBC Reports on Sexual Abuse: From Jimmy Savile to the Catholic Church." It was sent to the bishops, and to select media outlets in the U.S. and the U.K. The original is available online.*

*Donohue wrote this in the aftermath of a report on BBC icon Jimmy Savile, and his employer's reaction to his long history of serial rape. That report was written by a former judge, Dame Janet Smith; below is a shortened version of Donohue's analysis of her report on the BBC. The next Catalyst will address the way the BBC has treated senior officials in the Catholic Church over the priestly abuse scandal.*

*As will be shown in Part I, the Smith report exonerates all the senior management of the BBC—she claims none of them knew anything about Savile's conduct. Yet the BBC's reports on the Vatican, as will be shown in Part II, claim that everyone from the pope on down knew about instances of priestly sexual abuse all over the world.*

## *Overview*

*The Dame Janet Smith Review Report on BBC serial rapist Jimmy Savile has many strengths and weaknesses. Her greatest strength is her ability to understand the sociological underpinnings of Savile's predatory behavior and the reasons why his conduct was not taken seriously at work.*

*Smith's greatest weakness is her readiness to exculpate the BBC hierarchy: she wants us to believe that *no one* in a senior*

management position ever knew anything about Savile's sexual offenses. What makes this so remarkable is Savile's long history of abuse: he worked at the organization for more than 25 years—molesting some of his victims on the premises of the BBC—and he bragged about his exploits in public.

The report was three years in the making and it runs more than 700 pages. By any measure, Jimmy Savile was one of the most beastly sexual abusers in recent history.

To get a sense of who Savile was, Americans can fathom a cross between Dick Clark of "American Bandstand" and comedian Jerry Lewis (this was how Bill Keller of the *New York Times* aptly put it). If we coupled this admixture with a heady dose of Michael Jackson and Pee-wee Herman, we get a sense of who he was. Regarding his behavior, he made the latter two look angelic.

What brought Savile instant recognition was his show "Top of the Pops," which debuted in 1964. It was broadcast early on Saturday evenings, bringing him to the attention of families. In 1975, he launched a new BBC show, "Jim'll Fix It"; it attracted 16.5 million viewers, an astonishing number even by today's standards. Two years later, he won a prestigious award for "wholesome family entertainment." One major newspaper said that this show made him the "favourite uncle to the nation's children." Yet by this time he had raped many of them.

Savile's role as a regular BBC host ended in 1994 when "Jim'll Fix It" went off the air. But he was not done: he co-hosted the final "Top of the Pops" show in 2006. He died five years later.

### *Savile's Predatory Behavior*

"Savile had a voracious sex appetite," the report says. "So far as I can tell," Smith observes, "he never had and did not want a lasting sexual relationship and he never had an emotional attachment to anyone with whom he had a sexual

relationship.” That’s because he was a classic narcissist, incapable of giving himself to another human being. Savile did what he did—fondling, grabbing, raping—because that is what he wanted to do. How others felt, even those he did not force himself on, did not matter.

Before turning to Smith’s report, consider what we know from other independent sources.

Savile was so sick that he actually assaulted his own niece. Sadly, her grandmother knew about it but kept quiet, and that is because her brother, Jimmy, made sure she had a comfortable lifestyle. Savile routinely got away with conduct like this. In 1976, when a man walked into Savile’s dressing room and found him molesting a 9-year-old boy, he simply said, “Oops,” and shut the door.

Here is what *MailOnline* said about Savile’s victims in 2012: “The picture they paint is of a ‘classic’ child abuser, targeting vulnerable youngsters at schools, hospitals and children’s homes....He plied them with treats—under the noses of teachers, doctors and BBC managers—and took them for rides in his Rolls-Royce....Savile sexually abused them in his car, his BBC dressing room, on hospital wards and in the bedrooms of girls at Duncroft boarding school in Surrey.” Indeed, one of his victims at the latter institution said that he “treated Duncroft like a paedophile sweet shop.”

Savile was evil. How else to describe a man who would rape a 12-year-old girl during a secret Satanic ritual in a hospital, screaming “Hail Satan” in a candle-lit room? What other word could be used to describe a man who performed sex acts on hundreds of dead bodies in a hospital where he was a volunteer—for over 60 years (1951 to 2011, the year he died)?

According to the U.K.’s National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Savile abused more than 500 people. But Smith, relying only on uncontested evidence, understandably

puts the figure much lower. As a judge, she confined herself to 75 complainants, accepting the evidence of 72 of them. What she found is reeling.

Of the 72 victims that Smith interviewed, 57 were female and 15 were male. Twenty-one of the female victims, and 13 of the male victims, were under 16. Eight were raped (six female and two male; there was an attempted rape of one female victim). Forty-seven victims were the subject of indecent/sexual assault excluding rape (34 female and 13 male).

Savile was born in 1926 and started working in ballrooms and doing radio jobs in the 1950s. In 1959, he made his first appearance as a guest on "Juke Box Jury" at Lime Grove Studios. That same year he raped a 13-year-old girl at work. On January 1, 1964, he started his fabulously successful "Top of the Pops"; it was the beginning of his long career at the BBC. He then went on a rampage sexually assaulting and raping young men and women in bathrooms, his home, dressing rooms, his camper, and on staircases. So bold was he that he even sexually assaulted a 15-year-old girl on a podium during the recording of "Top of the Pops."

In 1974, Savile published his biography, *As It Happens* (more about this later). The following year he launched "Jim'll Fix It." He continued his predatory behavior, sexually assaulting a child (aged 10-12) in a church. In 1976, his autobiography was republished under the new title, *Love is an Uphill Thing*. That same year he raped a child of 10 or 11 in his dressing room.

Savile ceased presenting "Top of the Pops" in 1984, but it wasn't until 2006 that the final episode of this show was aired. In 2009, he was interviewed by the police following reports of sexual assault at a school, but nothing came of it. In fact, nothing ever came of any investigation. Savile died in 2011, and six weeks later a BBC probe of his offenses was abandoned. But a year later, the BBC announced there would be

two independent investigations.

Most of Savile's assaults took place in his residence, but he was not shy about attacking his victims at work. According to Smith, "Savile would gratify himself whenever the opportunity arose." Indeed, she learned of incidents "which took place in every one of the BBC premises at which he worked." Whether on the set, in dressing rooms—even when recording live on camera—he did exactly what he wanted.

Savile's victims were across age and sex lines. "Savile's youngest victim from whom I heard was just eight years old," Smith said. Of course, Savile's sexual appetite was not limited to the very young. He would seek gratification from men and women, boys and girls. Those most at risk were teenage girls.

### *The BBC's Response*

The BBC had very relaxed norms in the 1960s and 1970s. They were effectively exploited by Savile. Smith found that officers would tolerate sex but not being drunk or coming to work late. For example, in 1969, a woman complained to her superiors after Savile grabbed her breasts but nothing was done about it. "The reaction of one of the managers was to show no surprise and to suggest that it would have been more surprising if Savile had not tried to touch her." Smith concludes, "That was an inappropriate reaction but one which is not surprising given the culture of the times."

Savile's bosses were actually worse than being indifferent to his offenses. For example, Smith describes how he "put his hand down inside her knickers underneath her bottom," and when the young girl complained, "a security officer was summoned and told to escort her off the premises. She was taken out and left on the street."

Smith contends that even though Savile's superiors knew of his conduct, the BBC's hierarchy was kept in the dark.

“In summary,” Smith says, “my conclusion is that certain junior and middle-ranking individuals were aware of Savile’s inappropriate sexual conduct in connection with his work for the BBC. However, I have found no evidence that the BBC, as a body corporate, was aware of Savile’s inappropriate sexual conduct in connection with his work for the BBC.” Similarly, “No senior manager ever found out about any specific complaint relating to Savile’s inappropriate sexual conduct in connection with his work for the BBC.”

The English media rejected Smith’s exculpatory account of senior management. Indeed, most newspapers branded her report a “whitewash.”

It can be debated how much or how little the higher ups in the BBC knew of Savile’s behavior from managers below them. But it strains credulity to suggest that none of them knew of his very public admissions of sexual conquest: he wrote about them in his books.

In his autobiography, *As It Happens*, Savile bragged how he liked group sex, saying that his celebrity status meant that girls were “throwing themselves” at him. He estimated that about 20 percent of female audiences would “fancy” him, concluding that about 25 “super dolly birds” would be “putting the pressure on me” each night.

The *Guardian* loved his book, calling it “very funny.” The review, as Smith notes, included a quotation about all the places Savile had sex: “trains and boats and planes and bushes and fields, corridors, doorways, floors, chairs, slag heaps, desks and probably everything except the celebrated chandelier and ironing board.”

In short, Savile did not hide his sickness—it was there for everyone to see. His superiors were enablers, and for that they should be held accountable. But no one was ever held accountable for anything he did, regardless of whether his

victims were boys and girls or young men and young women.