

No Spanking In Church, Please

By **Alexander Baron** - Apr 2, 2016



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I would have published this article yesterday, but this is no April Fool's Day joke. After a trial lasting several weeks, the Reverend Howard Curtis, former minister at Coulsdon Christian Fellowship, has **been convicted** at Croydon Crown Court of a number of offences of assault, including indecent assault, against female members of his then congregation. Many of these offences were historical in nature, always a recipe for **miscarriage of justice**. Some of them dated back to 1969; although he was convicted only of offences dating back to the 1980s, they include sexual assaults on adult women and one of neglecting a child. He was said to have been a self-styled minister who ran the church like a cult.

This sort of scurrilous tale and associated rhetoric is grist to the mill for the tabloids, and indeed one such tabloid – which will not be linked here – has run a big story about it. Sentence has been deferred until April 22 when he has been told he can expect a

custodial sentence. Although he admitted administering discipline to a number of women, he justified it on religious grounds, it was said to be part of something called **Christian Domestic Discipline**, which is a *bona fide* theological belief and practice, even if it does sound like something the late **Cynthia Payne** would have administered to elderly gentlemen at her infamous parties.

Much as I hate to destroy this lustful narrative, Coulsdon Fellowship is not and never has been a cult. It is rather unusual for a church in that part of the way it spreads the Gospel is through its associated clubs, in particular it runs **Coulsdon Chess Club**, which is one of the largest and most successful clubs in the country. The word *cult* implies a certain secrecy or at the very least confidentiality. From May 1997 until about early 2001, I was a very active chess player on the London and South Eastern circuits; I played at Coulsdon many times in both league matches and tournaments. The door to the building was always open, and although doubtless confidential conversations including confessions were heard within, the idea that Howard Curtis or anyone else could have been bending naked women over the knee for kinky sessions to relieve depression sounds more than a little Aromatic.

The allegations of child neglect/child cruelty sound even less likely. Below is a previously unpublished photograph of Howard presenting a prize to **the tragic Jessie Gilbert** on April 27, 1996, when she was just 9 years old. After her suicide ten years later, he and his church were an enormous comfort to her family, including during an incident in December 2006 which is best not documented here. He helped establish the **Jessie Gilbert Celebration Tournament**, now in its ninth year.



Jessie Coulsdon (April 27th 1996)

The idea of him being gratuitously cruel to Jessie or to any child is totally at odds with everything I know about him. Sometime ago I had some correspondence with someone who worked with him for many years, and he said he was of the belief that there was nothing to these allegations, at least to the sexual element.

*This opinion article was written by an independent writer. The opinions and views expressed herein are those of the author and are not necessarily intended to reflect those of **TheLatestNews.com**.*

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