

John Everett Exposes Abuse Inside the Jesus Army Cult

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A man from County Durham has spoken publicly about his five-year involvement in one of Britain's most notorious religious cults, the Jesus Fellowship Church, more widely known as the Jesus Army. John Everett, now 68, was a member of the group from 1977 to 1982, during which time he witnessed coercion, isolation, and serious abuse.

The Jesus Fellowship claimed to offer a Christian lifestyle rooted in communal living, but beneath that surface lay a tightly controlled organisation. Everett joined the group's New Creation Christian Community, considered the inner core of the movement. Members were expected to hand over their possessions, including their homes, to a central trust fund, effectively surrendering their independence.

The group was led by Noel Stanton, who exerted near-total control. Everett described him as "a bad-tempered, playground bully boy," adding, "He was coercive, he lied, and he didn't care that individuals were being harmed as long as they were compliant pawns within his master plan."

At its peak, the Jesus Army attracted over 3,000 members across the UK, particularly in Northamptonshire, London, and the Midlands. It presented itself as a force for good among the vulnerable, but Everett said that supposed charity masked a darker purpose: "The aim was always to bring people into the fellowship that was the real reason for their outreach."

While at university, Everett was tasked by Stanton to write a thesis defending the group's practices amid growing media criticism. One article at the time, published in News of the World, carried the headline "How hard line Noel beats out the devil." Stanton hoped Everett's work would counter such claims.

However, the research had the opposite effect. "I began to realise we had all the characteristics of a cult: one man at the top, enforced obedience, separation from families. People who left were labelled traitors," Everett recalled.

A turning point came when Everett was barred from giving his sister £20 during a period of financial difficulty. "We were told that charitable welfare wasn't of God. That was the moment I knew I had to get out."

He eventually left the community, an act seen by Stanton as rebellion. "I was warned I'd face God's judgement. After I left, I was completely cut off by everyone I knew in the group, some of whom had become like family."

In 1986, Everett moved to Durham to train as a vicar at the university, but the emotional toll of his past caught up with him, triggering a severe mental health crisis. "I believed I was being judged by God. It was the darkest period of my life," he said. He eventually recovered,

crediting the experience with giving him a deeper resolve to prevent others from enduring similar trauma.

Now retired, Everett has written a book about his time in the Jesus Army, titled *War and Defeat: The Jesus Army and Fellowship Revisited*. “I have three children and seven grandchildren. Life has its challenges, but I’ve found peace,” he said.

The downfall of the Jesus Army began following Stanton’s death in 2009. A new leadership initiated a disclosure process, inviting former members to report incidents of abuse. This led to Operation Lifeboat, a major investigation by Northamptonshire Police. While some prosecutions were secured, many allegations lacked the evidence needed for criminal charges.

An internal review later confirmed over 300 reports of abuse, more than 30 of which involved Stanton. The community acknowledged systemic failings and set up a redress scheme, which has paid out millions in compensation.

The group was formally dissolved in 2017. Everett now appears in the BBC documentary *Inside the Cult of the Jesus Army*, which features the voices of survivors for the first time. “It’s important that these stories are finally being heard,” he said.