

**Deloitte.**The Cambridge Union Society
9A Bridge Street
Cambridge, CB2 1UBEmail: press@cus.org

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SPOTLIGHT JOURNALISTS SPEAK AT UNION
The “first big investigative story of the internet era”

Michael Rezendes and Walter Robinson are two of the Pulitzer-prize winning journalists whose work at *The Boston Globe* on the child abuse scandal within the Catholic Church brought the issue to international attention. Spotlight, the investigative team of which Rezendes and Robinson were part, and their reporting on the scandal is the subject of the recent film *Spotlight*. Yet to be released in the UK, the Union organised a screening of the film with Entertainment One, prior to the panel discussion.

Speaking first of the dramatisation of their work, Michael said that “the movie is remarkably true to both the substance and the spirit of what we did”. Walter added that “we like to think that the actors are far better reporters than we are because they did it in 2 hours 8 minutes, whereas it took us 8 months”.

The initial article, which is available on *The Boston Globe* website, was described by Walter as the “first big investigative story of the internet era...2 years earlier it wouldn’t [have], but it went viral. The next day we had calls from people in the UK, Ireland, France who wanted to tell us their stories.” The calls prompted the paper to add contact details of a rape crisis centre to their website.

Of the calls the Spotlight team received in the days following the publication of the article, for many survivors the team “were the first [people] they had ever told”, said Walter; “a call from an 82 year old man who had been abused 75 years earlier when he was 12 years old, he had carried that burden thinking he was the only one it had ever happened to”.

Asked about whether the response from the church after 2001 had been adequate, Walter said “the answer is no. The church’s attempts everywhere at rectifying wrong have been inadequate.” Further, when the Pope visited America in 2015 he praised the “courage of the American bishops in dealing with this crisis, which was found to be appalling by survivors and not in keeping with the facts by people like us”. On the moving of Cardinal Law from Boston to Rome, Walter commented with derision that he got a “10,000 Euro allowance and a cook.”

In a conclusion which offered advice to student journalists, Michael commended local reporting, stating that “local investigative reporters are watchdogs of democracy”. To which Walter added, “if you do something good, someone might come along and make a film about it”.

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For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>

Thursday, 21 January 2016