

FROM THE HEAD MASTER LANCING COLLEGE SUSSEX
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20th January 1993

Dear Detective Inspector Murdock,

I am writing to you in connection with the charge that I understand has been made against the Bishop of Gloucester, and I should like to explain to you the basis of my knowledge of the Bishop and his dealings with young people over the past 25 years.

I was Head Master of Rugby School between 1967 and 1981, and then became Head Master of Lancing College. Father Peter, as he then was, came to preach at Rugby School in the late 1960's, and at my invitation returned to the School at regular intervals thereafter, to preach and to give spiritual counsel to pupils and members of the staff. Several members of the School also became involved in his work setting up the premises of the Community of the Glorious Ascension at Watchett in Somerset. My wife and I stayed at the monastery on more than one occasion.

The spiritual influence of Father Peter was in my view of unique value to many pupils, and helped several of them to develop from fairly commonplace individuals into people of vision, generosity and strong Christian commitment. These pupils regularly talked to the Chaplain and myself about the help they received from Father Peter, and at no time did we or any of the Housemasters have the slightest cause for anxiety about the relationships which developed between Father Peter and themselves.

By the time I moved to Lancing in 1981, Father Peter had become Bishop of Lewes, and had set up the training scheme for school-leavers, "Give a Year to God". Subsequently he also founded the Community of Little Brothers at Litlington, providing an introduction to a dedicated Christian life for young people. Several ex-Lancing pupils became involved in these schemes, and here again one was struck by their personal and spiritual development, and the great benefit they received from the Bishop's example and teaching.

There can be no doubt that within the Church of England the Bishop of Gloucester is unique in his capacity to communicate the Christian faith and inspire young people in their quest for a closer relationship with God. He is able to achieve this because of his own exceptional spirituality and the rigorous self-discipline he imposes on himself. His life style, beginning with prayer in the small hours of each morning, must be almost unparalleled, and is clearly a foundation of his spiritual life.

From conversations with him I know that the Bishop is acutely distressed by some aspects of late 20th Century culture, including its accent on materialism and sexual permissiveness which make it so much harder for people to realise their spiritual vocation. In this context I understand that he has used acts of penitence and contrition that are an expression of that deep concern. To the extent that young people have been involved in such penitential exercises, I can see that these may have been open to misunderstanding and misrepresentation, especially by any who have not grasped the "absolute" nature of the Bishop's religious commitment. The Bishop may have failed to judge the

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appropriateness of such exercises for some of the young people whom he is so anxious to help. But the one thing of which, from my long knowledge of him, I am absolutely certain is that his intention towards all people, young or old, is wholly that of Christian concern and compassion, and that to harm any person would be completely abhorrent and alien to his nature. He may be guilty of an innocence that fails to anticipate how his teaching and example might be construed - the innocence that is also one of his most valued attributes. But there cannot be any doubt among those who know the Bishop well of his integrity, compassion and respect for all human beings, and particularly for the young people who have gone to him over so many years for help and teaching, and who have benefited so much from his guidance.

If I can be of any further assistance in connection with this matter, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Yours sincerely,

James Woodhouse

Detective Inspector Wayne Murdock,
Central Police Station,
Bearland,
Gloucester.

