

Superior, or to anyone else, what that member said. Nor will a Visitor tell outsiders the recommendations or instructions he or she has given to a community. Every community, just like any family, is entitled to its privacy.

However, I think it is right to say that, in December 2003, at the time of the first Visitation which I made at Ealing, several members of the monastic community were concerned about Father David Pearce. They clearly felt that he was a child abuser, and that he was not being reined in as he should have been. Some very specific instances were given of how he would go through the school in order to reach some offices. I was asked to urge the Abbot to tighten up the restrictions which he had imposed on Father David, which these members of the community felt were being flouted. I did make this point to the Abbot, and he assured me that he would do as requested.

When I came back for the next Visitation of the monastery in 2007, things were very different. A lawsuit had been brought against the Trustees of Ealing Abbey on account of abuse allegedly perpetrated by Father David, and the Trustees had been found liable, though for significantly less than the plaintiff had claimed (as Father David was at pains to point out to me). It was now in the public forum that Father David was accused of child abuse, and a judge had made it clear that he believed this to be true. However, this was not a criminal case, and Father David was a free man afterwards. The Abbot, who clearly believed that the allegations of child abuse were true, told me that the police felt that there was insufficient evidence to warrant a prosecution. This is, of course, a fairly familiar story when dealing with the sexual abuse of children.

Furthermore, [RC-F41] had been tried on a count of child abuse, and had been acquitted. It was reported to me that this was not a case of the evidence being insufficient to the jury, but that it was clear that he was innocent. I understood that, in spite of this, [RC-F41] was under restrictions because of another incident, which he acknowledged had taken place.

It emerged strongly during this Visitation that the appearances in court of Father David and Father [RC-F41] had caused a lot of sadness and pain in the community. Indeed, in my final report I described it as a “searing experience” for the community; one that had caused a hurt from which the community was still suffering.

During the period leading up to the civil case, Father David had been asked to live elsewhere, outside the monastery. When the case was ended, the Abbot decided that he should be allowed to return to the community. This is probably the most controversial decision the Abbot made during the whole sorry episode, and the Independent Schools Inspectorate, echoing the report of the Charities Commission, quoted also by Lord Carlile, suggests that “the commitment to trust within the Community and to St Benedict’s Rule of love and forgiveness appears on occasion to have overshadowed responsibility for children’s welfare.” My view is that it is a lot more complex than this.

What is the Abbot supposed to do with a person whom he is pretty certain has abused children, but whom the courts are not able to put behind bars? Until the seventeenth century, monasteries had prisons for recalcitrant monks: no longer. Conventional wisdom says that such a person should be expelled so that the monastery will not be held responsible for any abuse which he commits. Put in another way, if the person