

Retired Bishop Lands in Jail for Sexually Abusing Young Men

A retired British Anglican bishop was jailed on Wednesday for exploiting his position to abuse young men, some of them aspiring priests, for sexual gratification over a 15-year period.

Local media reported that Peter Ball, bishop of Lewes in southern England between 1977 and 1992, had escaped prosecution when the claims first arose in the early 1990s after lawmakers, a senior judge and a member of the royal family intervened.

Prosecutor Bobbie Cheema said police had received telephone calls supporting him from numerous establishment figures including royalty, cabinet ministers and a lord chief justice, the *Guardian* newspaper reported.

Sentencing him at London's Old Bailey court, Justice Alan Wilkie said Ball was a man who had "done so much good but also so much harm" by using his position to exploit victims by saying the abuse was part of an "austere regime of devotion."

The court was told Ball had at one stage intended to defend his actions using the teachings of the 13th-century Italian preacher Saint Francis of Assisi.

"You expressly accept that you obtained sexual gratification from the deliberate manipulation of vulnerable young men and that your frequent contact, over a period of time, with most of your victims was of a kind consistent with grooming," Wilkie said.

One of his victims tried several times to take his own life in

1992, Wilkie said, and did commit suicide when the case was revisited in 2012.

"I'm very, very, very sorry," a frail-looking Ball, who last month admitted to offenses including misconduct in a public office and indecent assault involving 18 young men, said as he entered court.

Paul Butler, the Church of England's lead bishop on abuse issues, said Ball's jailing was a matter of "deep shame and regret," adding that the former bishop had maintained his innocence for decades until just weeks ago.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has commissioned an independent review into the Church's handling of the case, he said.

Ball was first reported to the authorities in 1992 but only given a caution the following year by police for committing an act of gross indecency. That led to his resignation as a bishop.

British police are currently investigating a string of allegations that powerful figures—including senior politicians—were involved in pedophile rings over three decades since the 1970s.

However, a BBC documentary on Tuesday cast doubt about the reliability of evidence given by a man involved in the most high-profile inquiry into claims a pedophile ring made up of senior lawmakers and other establishment figures were involved in the murder of three young boys. {eoa}

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