Exclusive: Oxford Dean victim of 'abhorrent and wholly unjustified' campaign, faith leaders and academics claim

In a letter seen by the Telegraph, key figures have written in support of the Very Rev Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church college

[*By*Camilla Tominey,](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/authors/camilla-tominey/) ASSOCIATE EDITOR1 June 2020 • 7:00pm

Members of Christ Church's governing body tried to have the Dean removed from post CREDIT: REX

A former Archbishop of Canterbury and four Bishops are among a group of faith leaders and academics who have thrown their weight behind the Dean of Christ Church [amid an ongoing row over his tenure at the prestigious Oxford college.](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/05/21/oxford-dean-row-reignites-trustees-calling-removal-say-has-lack/)

Lord Carey, who was the head of the Church of England from 1991 to 2002, is among 60 signatories to a letter accusing critics of the Very Rev Martyn Percy of employing “devious methods and offensive language” to try to depose him.

The Bishops of Bristol, Salisbury, Buckingham and Brisbane have also signed the letter, sent to the Telegraph, along with former Church of England envoy Terry Waite and former Tory minister turned priest Rev Jonathan Aitken.

It is the latest salvo in an increasingly acrimonious war of words between Dr Percy, who is thought to be paid around £90,000 a year for presiding over both the college and Cathedral, and a number of Oxford dons who have repeatedly called for him to step down.

Last month, the Telegraph reported that 41 members of Christ Church’s governing body had written to the Charity Commission accusing Dr Percy of “unsound judgement” and “a consistent lack of moral compass” in a bid to have him removed from the Board of Trustees. They also accused him of breaching his legal, fiduciary and safeguarding duties and of leaking confidential material to the press.

[Dr Percy was reinstated as Dean of Christ Church last September](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/09/17/oxford-alumni-attack-college-bitter-campaign-against-dean/) after being suspended for alleged "immoral, scandalous and disgraceful behaviour".

The quad at Christ Church College, Oxford CREDIT: Andrew Crowley

An internal tribunal by retired high court judge, Sir Andrew Smith dismissed the complaints against the Anglican priest and theologian following an 11-day hearing behind closed doors in June. The full judgment was never published.

In February, [leaked emails appeared in the press revealing Oxford academics](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/02/16/oxford-college-dons-poison-email-row-attempt-oust-christ-church/) had described the Dean as a "little Hitler", "thick", "nasty" and a "manipulative little turd" with a "personality disorder".

Dr Percy has subsequently launched an employment tribunal against Christ Church claiming to have been victimised and seeking damages as a whistleblower.

The latest letter describes Dr Percy as “a man of consistently good character, an exceptional scholar, a respected public servant, and an outstanding Christian leader”.

Questioning why “some members of the Governing Body of Christ Church wish to go to such extreme lengths to destroy the reputation of their Dean and to break his spirit”, the letter suggests there has been a “sustained campaign against the Dean led by senior members of the college Governing Body since his appointment.”

It adds: “The suggestion that he “lacks a moral compass” is so far from the truth as to be laughable, were it not so insulting. We believe that Martyn Percy is a victim of gross injustice and malice.”

A spokesman for Christ Church, which is understood to have spent £2 million on the case already, said it was “fully committed to achieving a solution through independent mediation, to avoid the considerable cost that will otherwise be incurred through responding to the Dean’s Employment Tribunal claim against Christ Church.

“The Dean has suspended the mediation process, but Christ Church remains ready, open and willing to restart it whenever he wishes.”