



## Jonathan Aitken demands 'root and branch reform' of Church of England's 'culture of secrecy'

Rev'd Aitken said Lord Carey "is right to criticise the Church of England's processes for dealing with allegations against clergy"

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A former cabinet minister turned clergyman has waded into the row between Lord Carey and the Church of England as he called for "root and branch reform" to its "culture of fear and secrecy".

The Rev'd Jonathan Aitken made the controversial comments after Lord Carey, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1991 to 2002, criticised the Church of England's "[brutal treatment of him](#)" over allegations he covered up abuse, saying that both survivors and clergy face a "culture of fear".

In a letter published today by *The Telegraph*, Rev'd Aitken, a former Tory cabinet minister, said that Lord Carey "is right to criticise the Church of England's processes for dealing with allegations against clergy".

He added: "Root and branch reform of the disciplinary procedures in the Church of England's and the governance procedures of Christ Church are sorely needed."

[Last week](#) it was revealed that Lord Carey, 85, had his ban on ministering overturned - a move welcomed by fellow clergy members as they urged Church officials to instead "concentrate their energies on those who are genuinely at fault".

After having his Permission to Officiate (PTO) - which acts as a licence to minister - reinstated after a seven month ban, Lord Carey launched an attack on the Church and its "[monstrous](#)" treatment of members of the clergy who are accused of or alleged to have committed wrongdoing.

Writing for *The Telegraph*, the former Archbishop said: "The current culture of fear in which survivors and clerics alike receive no kind of justice must be confronted."

Now, Rev'd Aitken has also voiced his concern, "about the flawed, slow and secretive procedures of what are called 'core group' investigations" into safeguarding cases."

"Such delays are not tolerated when it comes to complaints against Parliamentarians, civil servants, business executives or prison and probation service employees.

"Why should clergy be treated so much worse? The culture of fear and secrecy is a big factor here."

Rev'd Aitken became Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 1994, a Cabinet position, but resigned in 1995 following the allegations that he had violated ministerial rules.

In 1999 he was jailed for 18 months after admitting perjury and perverting the course of justice during a failed attempt to sue *The Guardian* newspaper for libel.

He had been an MP for Thanet in Kent for 23 years before losing his seat at the 1997 general election. It was while incarcerated, that he began to study the Bible.

At the time of having his PTO withdrawn, the Church of England said that new evidence linking Lord Carey to a review into abuse by the late John Smyth QC, had emerged.

The barrister, who died aged 77 in 2018, was accused of attacking boys he met at a Christian camp during the Seventies and Eighties. Seven months after Lord Carey's ban, the Rt Rev Dr Steven Croft, the Bishop of Oxford, reinstated his PTO because he did not "pose a safeguarding risk".

A Church of England spokesperson said: "When a safeguarding concern is raised the Church has a duty to respond and follows the House of Bishops guidance. All safeguarding concerns involving church officers are treated in the same way, irrespective of their position in the Church.

"The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA's) three public hearings and its final report quite rightly criticised the Church's response to survivors. We continue to learn and are committed to putting survivors at heart of our work."

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