

University refuses to strip honorary degree from disgraced Cardinal O'Brien

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St Andrew's University has rejected attempts to strip Cardinal Keith O'Brien of an honorary degree, despite his role in blocking an inquiry into sex abuse and his admission of sexual misconduct.

A campaign by Manfredi La Manna, an academic at St Andrew's, to have O'Brien stripped of his honorary degree in divinity has been rebuffed by university authorities, who said it would be "no more than an empty gesture".

In response, Dr La Manna asked "how low should an honorand's behaviour sink" before a degree is revoked.

Cardinal O'Brien [admitted in 2013](#) that his "sexual conduct" had "fallen beneath the standards expected of me" after a series of allegations about him were made public. One priest who came forward to expose O'Brien's conduct [described him](#) as a "predator".

O'Brien was [accused](#) of groping and kissing a 19 year old trainee priest in the 1980s, and at least 40 cases of sexual misconduct were [said to have occurred](#) between 1985 and 2010.

In addition, the Cardinal [blocked an inquiry](#) into clerical sex abuse.

La Manna added: "I would have thought that as O'Brien's behaviour was considered disreputable enough for the Holy See to withdraw his rights as Cardinal, the University would have been on safe grounds by rescinding his honorary degree."

Extraordinarily, St Andrew's criticised La Manna for his campaign, and the university "formally recorded its disapproval of the inappropriate manner in which the request had been brought into the public domain."

The lecturer said that he had behaved honourably and that it was a "sad day for academic freedom if the public expression of considered argument is regarded as 'an attempt to prejudice the decision-making processes of the committee'."

NSS spokesperson for Scotland Alistair McBay commented: "It can't be counted as a surprise that the call to rescind Cardinal O'Brien's honorary degree has been rebuffed, or that the university authorities have taken umbrage at having the matter raised with them. St Andrews University is very much an integral part of the Scottish establishment, the town is steeped in religious history, notably the Reformation, and its religious studies courses are well known.

"St Andrew's numbers as one of its alumni the former First Minister Alex Salmond, who [told us just recently](#) that he preferred dealing with people of faith to people of no faith.

"Salmond assiduously courted Cardinal O'Brien as part of the Scottish independence campaign and even after the Archbishop of St Andrews & Edinburgh's hypocrisy and sexual incontinence had been exposed, Mr Salmond was praising him as a good man for his Church and for Scotland. So the university's summary dismissal of the case was somewhat inevitable."

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