

# Calling a transgender priest a 'bloke' not offensive, rules CofE

## 29 March 2024

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Following a series of investigations into one of its former clergy, the Church of England (CofE) ruled that calling a transgender priest a 'bloke' and a 'fella' is not offensive.

Rev. Brett Murphy, 38, who has been supported by the Christian Legal Centre, had been investigated under a Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) for 'misgendering' the CofE's first transgender archdeacon, Rachel Mann, in a YouTube Vlog (<https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=4e8813c7fc&e=e5a6a4a6af>).

With 14,000 YouTube subscribers, Rev. Murphy discusses weekly news from a Christian Orthodox Anglican perspective on his channel.

In June 2023, in response to Rev. Mann being announced as the new Archdeacon for Bolton and Salford, he said that:

*"The Rev. Rachel Mann is in fact, biologically, a bloke, who identifies and lives as a woman."*

In the Vlog he questioned whether the new appointment was '*positioning*' Rev. Mann to become the CofE's first transsexual bishop and said:

*"So what you are seeing here is someone who is a radical rainbow activist being put in a position of high authority in a diocese."*

Rev. Mann had previously said to the media (<https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=f00fce920a&e=e5a6a4a6af>): '*I'm self-evidently a woman – but I'm glad I was once a man.*'

Despite Rev. Murphy subsequently leaving the CofE due its plans to introduce same-sex blessings to places of worship, a complaint was lodged against him under Section 13 of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 for his comments.

A CDM is a formal procedure for handling allegations of serious misconduct by clergy within the CofE. If a CDM is upheld by the presiding Bishop, it is kept on a clergy's 'blue file' and can lead to rebukes, dismissal and prevent further employment within the CofE.

After the complaint was initially rejected by the Bishop of Loughborough, in December 2023 (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/12/16/church-of-england-investigates-vicar-trans-archdeacon/>) it was re-opened after a review of the decision was requested by the complainant who said they were: *“unclear why the penalty of rebuke has not been considered.”*

### **'Not offensive'**

However, after reconsidering the CDM, his Honour David Turner KC Deputy President of Tribunals, made a recommendation to the Bishop of Loughborough for the complaint to be thrown out. He ruled that:

*“The words used ('bloke' and 'fella'), whilst arguably highly insensitive in their context, are not in themselves offensive words.”*

He concluded that:

*“It should not be thought (as Forstater made clear,) that there are no circumstances in which the use of language, with or without an intention to cause distress or offence, could cross a line into actionable misconduct, or even harassment.*

*“I have concluded here, looking at the overall picture of conduct alleged, that what was said falls short on the facts of any threshold for further proceedings. It follows that there is, therefore, no case to answer in respect of which a disciplinary tribunal should now be asked to adjudicate.”*

Since launching his YouTube channel, Rev. Murphy has faced a coordinated campaign against him resulting in a record four Clergy Disciplinary Measures (CDM).

All four complaints have been rejected, however, with Rev. Murphy exposing to the media how the CDM process is being *'abused and weaponised'* to silence, intimidate and force Anglican priests out of the CofE who do not affirm and celebrate LGBTQI+ ideology and the plans to introduce same-sex marriage to places of worship.

### **Landslide into apostasy**

**Responding to the decision, Rev. Murphy** who July left the CofE following its announcement that it planned to introduce 'same-sex blessings', **said:**

*“Sanity has prevailed in this instance, but sadly I believe it is too little too late for the CofE as it continues to fail to adhere to Biblical truth on issues of human sexuality.”*

Rev. Murphy, who is originally from Australia, added that he was *‘relieved’* that the investigation had been concluded, but that:

*“As a Christian minister it is my duty to continue to proclaim the gospel whenever I can. I make no apology for that.*

*“What has happened to me was a case of pure vengeance for daring to say what I have. It was an attempt to slur, slander and discredit me and take me down even though I have left the CofE. The fact that my story is even a story is pure madness.*

*“Despite this, or perhaps because of it, people across the world continue to subscribe to my YouTube channel to hear the Good News and truth of the gospel.*

*“The decisions by the CofE to investigate and pursue me for stating biological truth has reinforced and vindicated all the concerns that I raised in the original vlog.*

*“Getting a CDM through the post is a scary experience as it is the most formal complaint you can receive. You start to panic and believe your livelihood and career is on the line. I am concerned by how many clergy out there are going through the same process and are suffering in silence.*

*“Many orthodox Anglican clergy are on the receiving end of a system that is being misused and abused. The process is designed to get the bad guys, the clergy who have done something seriously wrong, not for stating biological truth that is aligned with the CofE’s own teaching.*

*“Orthodox priests in the CofE continue to tell me that they are being pushed out and bullied if they do not go along with the same-sex marriage agenda. They are being harassed, pushed to the margins, are having false complaints made about them, and, shall we say, are encouraged to be silent or leave.*

*“The CofE’s landslide into apostasy and irrelevance will continue unless there is radical change.”*

**Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:**

*“The Christian Legal Centre continues to deal with a huge volume of cases involving clergy who have been intimidated and punished simply for expressing standard Christian beliefs on marriage and sexual ethics.*

*“Promoting same-sex blessings is a catastrophe for the CofE. It is a clear departure from the biblical model for marriage. We will continue to see the Church of England decline if it insists on continuing this course.*

*“The churches that are growing in the UK are the ones that hold fast to traditional biblical teaching on marriage and family. This is what people want and expect from the Church.”*

### **Further background: The Vlog**

Opening his weekly Vlog on 23 June 2023 to his YouTube subscribers, Rev. Murphy discussed the latest news that week from the Diocese of Manchester.

The Bishop of Manchester, Rt. Rev. David Walker, who is one of the most vocal LGBT voices in the CofE, had announced that the Rev. Rachel Mann had been appointed the new Archdeacon of Bolton and Salford.

Rev. Murphy said:

*“Now you may wonder ‘is that really newsworthy, Brett’? You may roll your eyes, if you are a complementarian, that another feminist is getting a prominent high-ranking position in the CofE, but this is worse than that. The Rev. Rachel Mann is in fact, biologically, a bloke, who identifies and lives as a woman.”*

He described it as a *‘troublesome story’* and asks how Rev. Mann would deal with a member of their congregation who sees their lifestyle as in *‘complete rebellion against God’s word.’*

Discussing a recent article by Rev. Mann, Rev. Murphy highlighted that they wrote that not everything was bad about ‘The Fall’ in the Book of Genesis and that Eve’s rebellion against God was not that bad. *‘To me that is a heresy’*, he said.

### **Complaint dismissed**

Despite Rev. Murphy subsequently leaving the CofE, however, a complaint was made under Section 13 of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 against him for his comments in the Vlog.

In 2021 the complainant was appointed by the Bishop of Derby, Rt. Rev Libby Lane, to be the Diocesan Director for Education in Derby as well as Leicester.

This is the same Bishop of Derby and diocese which backed a school that sacked and reported Rev. Dr Bernard Randall to the government's counter-terrorism watchdog for a moderate sermon on the CofE's own teaching on marriage

([https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?](https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=879a38bc44&e=e5a6a4a6af)

[u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=879a38bc44&e=e5a6a4a6af](https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=879a38bc44&e=e5a6a4a6af)).

The same diocese and bishop oversaw an investigation into Dr Randall and concluded a risk assessment of him by stating that the Bible and the CofE's teaching on human sexuality is 'a risk to itself.' ([https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?](https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=d38ee00d1c&e=e5a6a4a6af)

[u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=d38ee00d1c&e=e5a6a4a6af](https://christianconcern.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35&id=d38ee00d1c&e=e5a6a4a6af))

Following the complaint, an investigation was launched by the Bishop of Loughborough, Rt Revd Saju Muthalaly, who said in his report:

*'The Complaint...has required me to give some considerable thought to the appropriate course of action. I recognise [Rev. Murphy] is no longer a licensed priest within the Church of England but he is still subject to censure under the Measure notwithstanding.'*

The Bishop concluded:

*'Despite my significant concerns and views [Rev. Murphy] should take serious stock about he is [sic] carrying out ministry, how he talks to and with people, particularly to and about those with whom he disagrees, I do not propose to take any further formal action under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 in respect of this Complaint having had regard to the Guidance by the Clergy Discipline Commission on Penalties. This letter will remain on Revd Murphy's file for the appropriate time.'*

## Complaint re-opened

Dissatisfied, on 3 October 2023, the complainant requested a review of the Bishop of Loughborough's decision and appears to have found an ally in The Worshipful Canon Ruth Arlow."

Canon Arlow, a barrister, was selected by the President of Tribunals for the CofE, Dame Sarah Asplin, to act under section 4 (4) of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 in conducting the review.

Canon Arlow said in her determination letter published on November 9:

*'The Complainant has now applied for a review of that decision. My role is to review rather than re-determine the Bishop's decision. Under section 13 of the Measure, I can only overturn that decision if I consider that that decision was "plainly wrong".'*

Furthermore, Canon Arlow, in a carefully worded paragraph which ultimately sends the message that CofE clergy should not criticise the introduction of transgender priests, stated:

***'At times as we seek to hear God's call for the Church in this generation, the clergy will hold different views. However, all debate should be had in a spirit of respect and love, and ministers should always be willing to work with each other, whatever views are held on current topics of debate.'***

Concluding, Canon Arlow said:

***'I have not found this an easy review to determine. I have nevertheless, after lengthy consideration, determined that the Bishop's decision was "plainly wrong". Accordingly, under section 13(3)(b) of the Measure I remit this complaint to the Bishop and direct that the Bishop reconsider his determination that there be no further action.'***

Following the ruling by the Deputy President of Tribunal's recommending the complaint be dismissed, the Bishop of Loughborough will decide whether to make any further entries on Rev. Murphy's 'blue file.'

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