

LGBT activist upheld theologian's sacking

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The sacking of a Christian lecturer by a Bible College for one tweet on human sexuality was upheld on appeal by a global LGBT activist who claimed in open court to be 'independent', a tribunal has heard.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, the case of Dr Aaron Edwards against Cliff College, a purportedly 'evangelical' Methodist Bible college in Derbyshire, has been heard before Employment Judge Jim Shepherd this week.

In March 2023, father of six, Dr Edwards, was sacked and threatened with a Prevent referral, for a single tweet on human sexuality following a disciplinary hearing and investigation which alleged that he had brought the college into disrepute and broken its social media policy.

The tweet said: "Homosexuality is invading the Church. Evangelicals no longer see the severity of this b/c they're busy apologising for their apparently barbaric homophobia, whether or not it's true. This *is* a "Gospel issue", by the way. If sin is no longer sin, we no longer need a Saviour."

Judge Shepherd has heard today how the Rev. Michaela Youngson, a former President of the Methodist Conference and senior member of the Methodist Church of Great Britain's Connexional Team was brought in by Cliff College, to rule on Dr Edwards' appeal of his

sacking.

Rev. Youngson described herself in evidence as 'independent' and said that Dr Edwards' internal appeal should have been heard by the Director of Learning for Ministry within the Methodist Connexional Team, Jonathan Dean.

However, Rev. Youngson says that this would have been 'potentially inappropriate' as Mr Dean is in a same-sex marriage and had had in the past 'differences of opinion' with Dr Edwards on the issue of same-sex marriage.

For example, Dr Edwards' appeal included grounds that the decision to dismiss him was 'disproportionate' 'imbalanced' , had not included 'the other side of the debate' and 'failed to balance my freedom to express my Christian beliefs.'

In March 2023, however, Rev. Youngson had dismissed Dr Edwards' appeal on every ground concluding that she believed Cliff College had treated the father of six 'generously' and had shown him 'pastoral concern' by sacking him with three month's pay.

She concluded: "I am content that the College acted appropriately and in good faith in reaching the conclusion to dismiss Dr Edwards."

'Nowt as Queer As Methodists'

A cursory glance at [Rev. Youngson's social media activity](#) and online presence, however, revealed that it was also completely inappropriate for her to hear the case.

Evidence that was admitted as part of the case revealed that Rev. Youngson is a leading founder of the [Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives](#) and has appeared at [gay pride London events](#) next to a sign which says: '[Nowt as Queer as Methodists](#)'.

The Global Interfaith Commission was founded by LGBT activist and member of the Church of England's general synod, Jayne Ozanne.

The aim of the commission, it says, is to: 'provide a strong and authoritative voice from religious leaders across the global faith community who wish to affirm and celebrate the dignity of all, independent of a person's sexuality, gender expression and gender identity.'

The Commission is managed by the [Ozanne Foundation](#), which has aggressively campaigned for same-sex marriages to be introduced to places of worship and which would be diametrically opposed to Dr Edwards' beliefs and position on the issues.

Tweets supporting same-sex marriage

In January 2023, after the CofE announced that it would allow 'same-sex blessings' in places of worship, Rev. Youngson retweeted a post by Jayne Ozanne, which included a [speech in parliament by gay activist and MP Chris Bryant](#), describing the move as a 'cruelty' for not allowing same-sex marriage.

The speech by Mr Bryant questioned whether there is any biblical teaching which says gay marriage is wrong and suggested that Jesus and St. Paul would have accepted it.

Rev. Youngson has also been featured in articles and videos to 'tackle gay discrimination' in the church and has in the past written to the government calling for a 'conversion therapy' ban, which over 2,000 church leaders across the UK believed would lead to them being criminalised for being faithful to biblical teaching.

Rev. Youngson has also taken part in online panel discussions on 'tackling prejudice' with Brandan Robertson, who believes in 'queering Christianity', and the Bishop of Liverpool, Paul Bayes, who has been a leading campaigning voice in the CofE against the conservative Christian beliefs that Dr Edwards holds.

This year Rev. Youngson has also authored 'The Inclusive Language Guide' for the Methodist Church which suggests replacing 'husband' and 'wife' with neutral terms to avoid offence.

Retweeting LGBT activists such as Steve Chalke, Rev. Youngson has also been outspoken on political issues and has been highly critical of the use of 'invading' language.

College was 'generous', Youngson said

In her evidence, Rev. Youngson said that Dr Edwards' tweet: "Wasn't part of an academic debate – it was a standalone tweet that Dr Edwards had put into a public forum on Twitter. There was no academic framework. An academic debate would include the counterpoint, not inflammatory and hurtful language."

Rev. Youngson has made this conclusion despite her own X/Twitter account retweeting posts on the migrant crisis, for example describing then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, as 'disgusting' 'inhumane' 'evil' and 'repugnant'.

She has also retweeted posts by Alastair Campbell telling all the Conservative prime ministers over the past decade to 'fuck off'.

Concluding her evidence in court, Rev. Youngson said:

"I considered Dr Edwards' appeal on its merits. Had I considered that it was not appropriate to dismiss him – I would have reinstated him. I actually considered that it was very generous to have paid Dr Edwards three months' in lieu of notice and believed that this was done on the basis of pastoral concern for Dr Edwards and his family."

Edwards' life 'irreversibly damaged'

Since Rev. Youngson's ruling, Dr Edwards has been to hospital with heart abnormalities due to the stress the sacking caused and believes his academic career and his family has been 'irreversibly damaged.' He has not been employed since.

After Dr Edwards' lawyers made an application in court, Judge Shepherd allowed the new evidence to be admitted as part of the case.

Both sides are now giving closing submissions with a ruling likely to be reserved.

Responding to the revelations, Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, said:

“The evidence is an appalling demonstration of the bias and unfairness that Dr Edwards experienced at every level from Cliff College and the Methodist Church hierarchy in response to his tweet.

“It is tragic that the structure of the Methodist Church has been taken over in this way which is in such stark contrast to the foundations which John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, put in place.

“It is wrong that his appeal was heard internally by a senior member of the Methodist Church who publicly campaigns against the beliefs he was sacked for.

“It is deeply saddening to see a once renowned Bible college losing its way by no longer upholding the truth about marriage. What message does Aaron's sacking send to the next generation of leaders and pastors, and the future of Christian witness.

“This case exposes a collapse in confidence in biblical truth in one of the very places where the next generation of Christian leaders is being trained.”

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