



**Commission of Inquiry  
into Discrimination  
Against Christians**

**CIDAC**

**Interim Report**

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The Commission of Inquiry into Discrimination Against Christians (CIDAC) was launched in October 2023. People reporting or complaining of discrimination because of their faith were invited to give testimony before a panel of Commissioners. The Commission is expected to last for a minimum of two years.

Between October 2023 and July 2024, CIDAC has held a total of 17 hearings. Prior to the launch of the Inquiry, Voice for Justice UK conducted a short survey, *The Costs of Keeping the Faith*, aimed at discovering to what extent – if any – Christians in the UK were experiencing intolerance, disadvantage, or discrimination on account of their faith. Over 1,500 responses were received from Christians of all denominations and of no denomination. Many respondents, who claimed to have suffered discrimination, have since contacted CIDAC with the aim of giving testimony. Our hearings to date therefore appear to represent the tip of a very large iceberg – of Christians self-reportedly feeling marginalised in what they regard as an increasingly hostile and discriminatory environment.

Witnesses represent a wide spectrum of Christian belief. To date, denominations have included 4 Catholic, 4 Anglican, 4 Evangelical, 2 Pentecostal, 2 Baptist, and 1 Free Church of England respondent.

All hearings have taken place via Zoom, before a panel of Commissioners specially selected for their expertise and/or experience in Human rights issues. Some Commissioners are legally qualified, others are drawn from a variety of backgrounds, including journalism and the charitable sector. All have experience of dealing with human rights issues.

Witnesses can elect to give their testimony either in public, via an open hearing, or in camera, so as to preserve their anonymity. The majority of our witnesses have opted for an open hearing, with members of the public able to attend by prior arrangement, via Zoom. All public hearings are subsequently posted in full on our YouTube channel, and the written summary of individual public hearings can be found on our website.

Two hearings, where the issues under discussion are currently subject to legal proceedings or are otherwise sensitive, have been held in camera.

## Overview

All our witnesses are committed Christians who follow the traditional teachings of the Bible.

### Discrimination in education:

**James Bland**, a volunteer teaching assistant at a local Primary school, JB enrolled on an SCITT teacher training course. From the start, he found that course work was heavily influenced by modern progressive ideology, with materials that he felt had been chosen ‘to advance a social purpose’.

As part of the course, JB was required to attend a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Day. The day focussed exclusively on transgender and sexuality issues. In private conversation with fellow students at the end of the session, he made what he describes as ‘a throwaway comment’, to the effect that ‘transgender stuff was a load of nonsense.’ The following week he was called to a meeting with the Course Director, who told him his remarks had been reported by a fellow student. He was quizzed on his beliefs and told the expression of such views was unacceptable. He was subjected to investigation and, as result, felt compelled to withdraw from the course.

**Ben Dybowski**, also a teaching assistant, was required to attend an internal staff training day, which ended with a seminar on equality and inclusion, labelled in advance as a ‘safe-space event’. During the course of the seminar, DB asked the speaker to clarify what was meant by the term ‘discrimination’, stating that, on the grounds of his faith, he believed marriage was between a man and a woman; that human life began at conception and should be protected; and that he was critical of some aspects of Islam. He was told by the speaker that ‘holding’ such views was fine, but that any expression of them was discrimination and wouldn’t be tolerated. It was later revealed in the press that the speaker at the event had links to Stonewall, and described himself as a bisexual campaigner for change.

BD was subsequently subjected to an internal investigation of his views by the school, and was sacked. Education Wales subsequently conducted its own investigation and exonerated BD, finding there was no case to answer. He was offered £10,000 compensation, subject to a non-disclosure agreement – which he rejected so as to be able to pursue a case for unfair dismissal through an employment tribunal.

**Aaron Edwards**, a lecturer in theology at a Methodist evangelical college in Bristol, was sacked after tweeting that ‘Homosexuality is a sin invading the church. Evangelicals no longer see the severity of this because they’re too busy apologising for the apparently barbaric homophobia ... This is a gospel issue by the way. For if sinners no longer sin, we no longer need a Saviour.’

As result of the tweet, AE was what he describes as ‘twitter-mobbed’ by LGBT activists, slandering and accusing him of homophobia. Instead of defending him, the College joined in their denunciation, saying the post did not reflect their ethos of inclusivity, and demanding he remove the tweet immediately and apologise. This AD refused to do, saying that an academic should be able to speak freely, and that the college environment should encourage discussion based on the free and frank exchange of views, without fear of reprisal from those who disagreed. AE was suspended, while the College carried out an internal investigation. He was also threatened with being reported to Prevent for hate speech. He was subsequently sacked, and is seeking legal redress.

**Keith Waters**, is a Christian minister, who was supplementing his income by working as a primary school caretaker. When he was offered the job, the school knew of his work as pastor of a local church, and from the start was keen to make use of his expertise, asking him to take morning assemblies and assist in religious education classes.

After he had been there for about a year, Cambridge held its first Pride festival. In his capacity as church pastor, KW tweeted on social media that support for Pride month was incompatible with Christian faith. Complaints about him were made to the school and it was ruled that the tweet was discriminatory and that KW had brought the school into disrepute. He was subjected to a disciplinary investigation and, from that point, was

excluded from all active participation in the school, as result of which he felt compelled to resign. He subsequently brought an action for constructive dismissal, which failed, only because he had resigned prior to the disciplinary hearing.

**Revd Calvin Robinson**, a deacon in the Free Church of England, was verbally and physically attacked while protesting outside a Drag Queen event held at Lewisham library. Protestors, demanding inclusivity and tolerance, shouted slogans such as, *“Drag queens are welcome, vicars are not”*. Following this event, CR was dismissed from his voluntary position on the education sub-committee at the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), for the expression on views deemed in conflict with the core values of RAD. The same week CR was dismissed, the RAD website was completely changed to carry a large rainbow flag on the Home page in celebration of Pride, and with a dedicated LGBTQI+ section. He took legal action against RAD for harassment, and for direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of his Christian belief. He received an out of court settlement of £8,000.

**Elizabeth Harewood**, Executive Officer for the Association of Christian Teachers (ACT), was invited to speak at a relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) conference, organised by Westminster Insight (WI). She was asked to speak, in particular, on religious and cultural sensitivities when planning, teaching, and delivering RSHE. She was, she said, looking forward to the event as an opportunity to bring in the Christian perspective on relationships and sex, and the place of marriage.

The invitation was subsequently withdrawn following complaints from other ‘contributors’, who, she was told, had threatened to withdraw over what they saw as a potential clash of ideologies in relation to sensitive LGBT topics. EH assured the conference organisers that as a Christian she respected all, equally, and had no intention of being in any way adversarial, but that she merely wished to represent the Christian viewpoint. Offers to meet with those expressing concern were rejected. She later learnt that it was Stonewall that had complained about her inclusion. As a result, not only had EH been asked to withdraw from the conference, but two sessions on religious and cultural sensitivities, and on transgender, were cancelled.

Following the event, the Managing Director of Knowledge Exchange, of which WI is a part, unreservedly apologised to EH for being asked to stand down.

### **LGBTQI+ allegations of hate crime:**

**Harry Miller**, a former policeman, was placed under investigation by North Humberside Police for a series of allegedly ‘criminal’ gender critical tweets. The tweets were subsequently acknowledged not to be in any way criminal, but HM nevertheless had a non-crime hate incident (NCHI) recorded against him. At the time of the complaint, North Humberside Police were listed as Stonewall champions, and were fully supportive of Pride. HM mounted a legal challenge against the NCHI, which he won on appeal, and subsequently set up the campaigning organisation, Fair Cop, a gender critical police support network. He continues to provide support for police officers finding themselves similarly under investigation.

**Jenny Yates**, a part-time hospital chaplain and former nurse and midwife, was accused of extreme homophobia following a conversation about same sex marriage with a patient, whose daughter was trans-gender. In an attempt to be light hearted, as she was leaving, JY repeated the rhyme, *‘... God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, otherwise we*

wouldn't be here, would we?". A complaint was subsequently lodged against her by the patient, who alleged that JY had quoted extensively from the Bible – which she denies. JY was subjected to a disciplinary hearing and found guilty of professional misconduct. As a result of the hearing, restrictions were placed upon her work, which left her feeling unable to perform her job. She subsequently resigned.

**Jeff and Sue Green**, Christian guest house owners in Wales, received a complaint from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2013 over wording on their website, which contained the phrase, 'double rooms for married couples may be available'. The EHRC letter of complaint, which came out of the blue, stated that, under the Equality Act 2010, treating a civil partner less favourably than a married person could amount to discrimination on the grounds of *sexual orientation*. They demanded the removal of all such wording. To avoid further problems, the Greens replaced all double beds with single beds and constructed a new website, but their reputation had been damaged locally by the complaint and Jeff faced hostility as a councillor. There had never an any time up to then been a complaint by visitors to their website, or from those seeking accommodation at the guest house, and it seemed clear to the Greens that the complaint had been generated internally by the EHRC in support of LGBT rights. They felt there was no similar concession to their right to protection for their religious belief, despite the fact religion is similarly a protected characteristic under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

**Maureen Martin** was a well-respected housing manager for L&Q, a leading residential provider and housing association. In 2023, she stood as mayoral candidate for Lewisham. In her election manifesto, sent to voters, she stated, *'Marriage: I pledge to cut through political correctness and simply state the truth that natural marriage is between a man and a woman and is the fundamental building block for a successful society and the safest environment for raising children.'* Local residents, opposed to her election, accused her of homophobia and of views that were dangerous to the LGBTQ+ community, accompanied by calls for her to be sacked from her employment.

As a result, MM was called before a disciplinary hearing by her employers and accused of hate speech. L&Q Housing Association was a Stonewall Diversity champion, and in 2017 had invested £180,000 in Stonewall Housing, creating a three-year strategic partnership to support the development of services for the LGBTQ+ community. As a result of the disciplinary hearing, MM was dismissed. She appealed, arguing that her freedom to practise and manifest her Christian belief, as protected under law, was being ignored. L&Q settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.

**Revd Richard Fothergill** is an Anglican vicar and Director of the Filling Station network, whose bank account with Yorkshire Building Society was summarily closed after he sent an online message to YBS in response to a request for feedback. In his response, he expressed concern over the Building Society's promotion of transgenderism.

According to RF, YBS had become 'extremely woke', with the new CEO starting the bank's annual review with the statement that it was going to push diversity and the LGBT Pride agenda. He suggested the bank should confine its activities to providing banking services. Two weeks later he received a letter from the bank saying that they took a zero tolerance approach to discrimination and that, as result of his comments, their relationship with himself had irrevocably broken down. He received a cheque for all monies contained in his account, which was closed.

## **Intimidation by pro-abortion activists**

**Isabelle Vaughan-Spruce** is Campaigns Director for the pro-life advocacy organisation, *40 Days for Life*. She was arrested twice for praying silently outside a Birmingham abortion clinic, and on a third occasion was issued with a fixed penalty notice. On each occurrence the clinic was closed, and IVS was not carrying a placard or in any way demonstrating. On the first occasion, IVS was taken to a police station some miles from the clinic and much later released on bail. One of the conditions of bail was that she not go within a prescribed area of the clinic. Her car was parked within this area, so that retrieving it would be a breach of bail conditions. At the hearing before the Magistrate's Court some time later, no evidence of any offence was produced and she was acquitted.

In March the same year she was again arrested outside the same abortion facility and placed on bail for 3 months, with the condition that she not go inside the buffer zone around the clinic. In March she was informed by the police that no further action would be taken, but, while they apologised for the delay, there was no apology forthcoming for the arrest.

On the third occasion IVS was approached by two female police officers, as she again prayed silently outside the facility. This time the officers had written questions with them and, having asked them, they issued her with a fixed penalty notice. She is considering further action against the police.

## **Other**

**Dr Ben Knighton** lodged a complaint with Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council, following an announcement by the Council of their intention to introduce a 20mph speed limit across all roads. In its notice, reported in the local press, the Council highlighted certain categories of people from whom, they said, they anticipated there would be opposition. They were quoted as saying, '... men, middle-aged groups, people without a disability, **white British, heterosexuals and Christians** will generally consider their freedoms associated with driving are being compromised...' (emphasis added).

BK protested against the imposition of a traffic policy for which there was a demonstrated lack of local public support, and against the unsubstantiated generalisation which he said demonstrated bias against particular groups, namely, white British male Christians. In their response, the Council omitted to respond to BK's allegations of bias, but merely cited, without explanation or elucidation, the importance of equality.

## **Preliminary findings:**

Despite the fact religion is included in the list of protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 – of equal standing with the 8 other protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex, and sexual orientation – in the cases the Inquiry has so far heard there appears clear evidence that the freedom to practice and manifest Christian belief is being progressively reduced; and even, on occasion, deliberately ignored. This would seem to be a result of activist groups, dedicated to the promotion and imposition of their favoured aims, deliberately targeting those who express views that they interpret as 'hostile' to the achievement of their goals.

This appears to be especially true where what is labelled ‘opposition’ is articulation of Christian, Bible-based belief. Our Inquiry has centred on the experience of Christians, but it would seem from media reports and a lack of legal cases seeking redress for similar discrimination, that other religious groups, such as Muslims, are accorded greater tolerance in the expression of their views, and that Christians are singled out for attack – perhaps because they are easy ‘targets’, who usually won’t fight back.

Our case studies indicate that expressions of concern based on Christian belief have resulted in accusations of bigotry, intolerance, and hatred – and even, on occasion, resulted in physical attack (as in the case of Calvin Robinson). Where such attacks have occurred in a work setting, Christians have been subjected to disciplinary proceedings and have even, on occasion, lost their jobs, with attendant damage to their reputations produced by accompanying publicity.

This reflects a disturbing restriction on the reality of freedom of speech in the UK, and on the right, similarly enshrined in law, to freedom of belief.

In the main, it is LGBTQI+ groups that appear responsible for such orchestrated opposition, but there is evidence of similar tactics being employed by others. For example, in the case of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, praying silently outside a known abortion facility without any obvious sign of demonstration or protest, it would seem to have been complaints by abortion activists that led to her arrest. In this particular case, it could be said that what happened was the result of a clash between competing ‘rights’; on the one hand, the right of pro-life campaigners to protest against abortion, and, on the other, the right of women to access abortion without interference or obstruction. But IVS was clearly not seeking to obstruct or interfere with anyone, and what took place appears to have been an attempt by the police to monitor and control ‘her thoughts’. Such an attempt marks a significant advance on the restriction of human rights in this country and is disturbing.

Our witness hearings indicate overall a growing intolerance towards those who hold traditional Christian beliefs. Such views appear propagated by those who espouse what have been popularly labelled ‘woke’ views, including, but not limited to, the opinions of LGBTQI+ and pro-abortion activists and campaigners. By repeated claims of victimhood and accusations of bigotry, intolerance, and hatred, such groups have sought to intimidate, humiliate, and suppress Christians who profess faith. Perhaps even more worryingly, as in the case of Jeff and Sue Green, there appears some evidence of a ‘search and destroy’ organisational approach by interest groups in education, business, banking, the health service, and even within government departments. Where this type of attack is experienced, there is very often an established link between the body in question and organisations such as Stonewall.

The evidence given by our witnesses so far would also seem to indicate that, far from lessening over time, as LGBTQ+ values become progressively ‘normalised’ within society, hostility is intensifying.

Although CIDAC is focussed on investigating the nature, context and scale of claimed discrimination and early onset persecution of Christians, our cases expose a more fundamental attack on the freedoms of all, namely the right to freedom of speech, and freedom of belief. The increasing acceptance and imposition of ‘woke’ values appears to be leading to a tightening of authoritarian control, where Christian belief especially is being actively suppressed. As reported by several of our witnesses, the right to hold such views remains absolute, but the right to express them is, at best, severely curtailed ... at worst, non-existent. This would appear to be a direct violation of the right enshrined in

law to manifest belief in public, regardless of supposed offence caused to those who do not share such beliefs.



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