



## *Joel Edwards and The Evangelical Alliance: Opponents of human rights for lesbian and gay people*

### *Why Joel Edwards should not have been appointed to the Equality Commission and should resign*

- Joel Edwards aggressively lobbies against law reforms introducing gay equality
- Joel Edwards promotes groups seeking to “cure” gay people
- Joel Edward’s organisation seeks exemptions from the very laws Equality Commissioners are charged with upholding

**Joel Edwards, leader of The Evangelical Alliance, has tried to stall or frustrate the passage of almost every single legislative reform or repeal promoting justice and fairness for the UK’s lesbian and gay citizens. His organization directly lobbies government and seeks influence in Westminster specifically to pursue this antigay agenda. Now he has been appointed a Commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement is appalled at this appointment and fears Joel Edwards will use his insider status to further The Evangelical Alliance’s antigay crusade from within the Commission. The LGCM believes this is a well-founded fear. Here’s why...**

As recently as February 2007, The Evangelical Alliance's General Director, Joel Edwards, wrote to the government asking for exemptions from having to comply with equality legislation in the provision of goods and services for lesbian and gay people. Specifically, it asked that Christian agencies be allowed to opt out of dealing with gay couples.

[http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/public-affairs/upload/adoption\\_response\\_feb\\_07.pdf](http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/public-affairs/upload/adoption_response_feb_07.pdf)

Six months later he was appointed a commissioner.

In their newsletter in April 2007, The Evangelical Alliance commented that laws requiring non-discrimination in the provision of goods and services would deprive Christian organizations from their right to discriminate against gays and lesbians:

*“The outcome suggests that rather than balancing rights, the right to live a homosexual lifestyle will effectively trump the right to live a Christian lifestyle in public... Following other recent controversial developments within the human rights industry, it appears that a hierarchy of rights is emerging, with religion and belief deemed bottom of the pile and subservient – especially to sexual orientation rights.”*

It is interesting that they scornfully refer to equality campaigners as “the human rights industry”, yet have accepted a role within the statutory equality body for their leader, Joel Edwards.

Furthermore, The Evangelical Alliance was angry that schools – including faith schools - would have to be respectful of gay and lesbian people. It complained:

*“Accordingly, it appears that in any school it will become unlawful to teach as objective truth that homosexual practice is wrong... the consequence of this would seem to be that homosexual behaviour, sex within marriage and heterosexual behaviour outside of marriage will be required to be presented as morally relative or neutral.”*

<http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/pqprayerandcampaigns/upload/april07pq.pdf>

It must be questioned whether anyone holding The Evangelical Alliance's views, let alone its leader, can honestly hold the position of an Equality Commissioner. In an August 2006 publication, The Evangelical Alliance made their view on the equality strands perfectly clear:

*“a homosexual lifestyle is a choice and is not to be classified in terms akin to race or gender.”*

<http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/pqprayerandcampaigns/upload/august06.pdf>

Further proof that The Evangelical Alliance philosophy in fact denies the existence of gays and lesbians as a class of people is the statement:

*Our focus is therefore not on human beings who experience same-sex attraction but on homosexual practice, which we regard as a behaviour choice, together with associated attempts to normalise it.*

<http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/public-affairs/upload/Getting%20equal%20briefing%20paper.pdf>

It should – at a minimum – be a requirement that an Equality Commissioner recognises LGBT people as a social group. Instead, The Evangelical Alliance prefers a strategy to ‘evangelise’ LGBT people out of existence. In May 2006, The Evangelical Alliance hosted a conference (‘Faith Hope & Sexuality’) promoting the so-called “Ex-Gay” movement, which promotes the idea that homosexuality is a choice and tries to ‘convert’ lesbian and gay people into heterosexuals, using techniques widely condemned by mainstream health-care professionals.

<http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/upload/final%20booking%20form.pdf>

In the April 2006 report, The Evangelical Alliance strongly argues for religious exemptions from having to treat LGBT people equally. It states:

*“There are no proposals to exempt activities where the sole or main purpose of the organisation offering the service is commercial, even if those activities are provided by an organisation related to religion or belief or by a private individual who has strongly held religious belief. So, for example a couple or individual running a hotel, or bed and breakfast would not be able to refuse to provide that service to a same sex couple. Also, where a church, charity or similar group with a religious ethos is contracted by a public authority to deliver a service on its behalf it will not be exempt from the regulations.”*

**It seems pretty clear, given the strength of feeling expressed in EA press releases and statements that Joel Edwards will use his position as an Equality Commissioner – overtly or covertly – to push forward this agenda – an agenda that seeks (a) to declassify LGBT people as a social group worthy of the same protection as race, gender and other equality strands, and (b) to lobby internally for religious exemptions from compliance with equality law.**

It is intolerable that for LGBT people seeking justice through the equality commission, they now have to confront an enemy within the body, and one such as Joel Edwards who has a long history of agitating against the full inclusion of the LGBT community under equality law – the very law he is charged with upholding, promoting and developing.

The Evangelical Alliance claims to disavow homophobia, but it is important to recognise that when they do this, they engage in sophistry. The “homophobia” they disavow is a very narrow definition and is not the same as the definition generally understood in the mainstream. This allows people like Joel Edwards to make fair-sounding statements like:

*“But we need also to recognise that the Church has at times expressed a hatred and prejudice towards homosexual people which has hardly reflected the character of Christ. In this report, ACUTE (Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals) presents us with a positive contribution to the contemporary debate on homosexuality and the gospel. It clearly affirms the orthodox view, but shows genuine sensitivity to current pastoral issues. In doing so, it disavows homophobic attitudes.”*

It’s qualification of homophobia is this:

*“Use of words: As an organisation, Evangelical Alliance repudiates homophobia where it actually occurs. However, it is unfortunate that the term ‘homophobia’ has been used in some quarters to signify disagreement with the Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay (LGB) agenda. Evangelical Alliance defines ‘homophobia’ as irrational fear, hostility and even revulsion, personal antipathy, prejudice or hatred against people who experience same-sex attraction. It manifests itself in terms of victimisation and abusive, demeaning or violent attitudes and behaviour. Our focus is therefore not on human beings who experience same-sex attraction but on homosexual practice, which we regard as a behaviour choice, together with associated attempts to normalise it.”*

<http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/public-affairs/upload/Getting%20equal%20briefing%20paper.pdf>

In other words, it does not agree that denying goods and services to lesbians and gays, or that telling lesbian and gay school-children that their experiences are not as valid as their heterosexual classmates, or that promoting the view that homosexuals are sinners unless celibate, is a direct attack on the dignity of LGBT people.

The layperson must understand that The Evangelical Alliance’s claim to not be homophobic means something quite different to the common understanding, and people should beware of being seduced by these pleasant-sounding statements.

This is a markedly different and more narrow definition of the far more generally accepted understanding of the term such as offered by the Encarta English Dictionary:

*“having irrational hatred of homosexuality: showing an irrational hatred, disapproval, or fear of homosexuality, gay and lesbian people, or their culture”*

So, when The Evangelical Alliance say they are not homophobic, that is by their narrow definition, not by the publicly accepted definition.

The Evangelical Alliance’s view of homosexuality is unequivocal. It was most bluntly expressed by David Hilborn, the Head of Theology at The Evangelical Alliance under Joel Edward’s leadership:

*“If homosexual practice is a sin, then it might be mitigated by faithful, loving partnerships, but it can't be redeemed by them. It can't be changed from a vice into a virtue, and the Church shouldn't pretend otherwise.”*

[http://www.eauk.org/theology/key\\_papers/Homosexuality/upload/htg.pdf](http://www.eauk.org/theology/key_papers/Homosexuality/upload/htg.pdf)

It is clear then that even Civil Partnerships, one of the most ground-breaking strides towards LGBT equality, do not meet with The Evangelical Alliance's approval.

Indeed, in a June 2006 edition of their newsletter, they complained about how the introduction of civil partnerships would inevitably undermine marriage and was "*part of a global campaign to impose a homosexual equality agenda on society.*"

<http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/pqprayerandcampaigns/upload/june06pq.pdf>

### **Does Joel Edwards agree with this view?**

If he does, he should resign and save the EHRC further embarrassment. If he does not, he should now stand up and clearly say so.

As an organisation, The Evangelical Alliance worked closely with the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship and with their help produced a briefing against the Sexual Orientation Regulations.

[http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/humanrights/upload/SOR\\_QandA.pdf](http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/humanrights/upload/SOR_QandA.pdf)

An advert placed by a coalition of Christian Groups calling itself "Coherent and Cohesive Voice" with "orchestrated legal input" from the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship placed a summary of this briefing in The Times newspaper on 28 November 2006 as a full-page advert. The Advertising Standards Authority launched an investigation following complaints and determined that "*the ad exaggerated the effect of the proposed regulations and was likely to mislead readers of The Times.*"

[http://www.asa.org.uk/asa/adjudications/Public/TF\\_ADJ\\_42880.htm](http://www.asa.org.uk/asa/adjudications/Public/TF_ADJ_42880.htm)

Thus in collusion with the CLF, The Evangelical Alliance was part of an effort to frustrate and pervert the introduction of important equality legislation.

### **Yet, now we have the leader of this organisation installed as an Equality Commissioner.**

What could be more bizarre?

In a 170 page report, entitled "Faith & Nation", with a forward by Joel Edwards, launched at the end of October 2006, The Evangelical Alliance noted:

*"Two main issues for evangelicals in this regard, as well as for other religious groups, relate to the increasing relaxation of the legal regulation of homosexuality and legislation in relation to gender reassignment. Both of these areas are highly problematic to most evangelicals and religious groups."*

<http://www.eauk.org/faithandnation/upload/Faith-and-Nation-2.pdf>

In other words, The Evangelical Alliance finds the “relaxation of legal regulation” of LGBT people “problematic”, again signalling the unsuitability of its leadership for roles in the Equality Commission.

The same report notes:

*“In the Church of England, evangelicals have at certain times found themselves standing with traditional Anglo-Catholics against liberal innovations - on homosexuality and radical feminism, for example.”*

Once again, The Evangelical Alliance makes it clear that it stands against “liberal innovations” of gender and sexual orientation. Once again it becomes unclear what Joel Edwards can achieve in a body which is the statutory embodiment of these “liberal innovations” granting equality to women and LGBT people.

To underscore this point, in yet another briefing on the Equality Act, The Evangelical Alliance complained that the Act would lead to *“the enforced normalisation of homosexual behaviour”*.

<http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/pqprayerandcampaigns/upload/March-April-2007-2.pdf>

**Given that Joel Edward’s organisation is so antagonistic to the Equality Act, what can he hope to achieve as a commissioner, other than to continue his campaign, by stealth or otherwise, to frustrate and undermine the cause of social equality – this time with the benefit of being on the inside?**

The Evangelical Alliance has consistently promoted a narrative that Christians are “at the bottom of the pile” of equality priorities. This is obviously nonsensical, given for instance the proliferation of Christian faith schools, the established role of the Church of England, and seats set aside for Bishops in the House of Lords. No other faith group or equality strand has this sort of direct power. Yet, at the same time as promoting this fiction, The Evangelical Alliance once again expressed the grievance that:

*“For example under the draft proposals a church which regularly allows outside organisations to use its premises may find that it will not be in a position to refuse a group which promotes a homosexual lifestyle. In the eyes of the Government what might happen in a church during a service at 11.30am on a Sunday does not have a bearing on how the church building is used throughout the week.*

*“Similarly many churches and other faith based organisations regularly provide services to the wider community through social groups for the elderly and parent and toddler groups amongst a variety of other activities. While we would not want anyone to be excluded from partaking of these opportunities we believe that it is important that churches should be able to retain the right to use these organisations for training and*

*teaching purposes which may include for instance upholding marriage between a man and a woman as the ideal basis for stable family life.*

*“Individuals, as well as organisations, will be covered by the proposals so where the sole or main purpose of an organisation is commercial there will be no exemptions on the ground of religion and belief. In practice this will have implications for Christians running residential facilities”*

[http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/reach/upload/REACH\\_proof\\_27\\_9\\_06.pdf](http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/reach/upload/REACH_proof_27_9_06.pdf)

Once again, it is perfectly clear that the entire agenda of The Evangelical Alliance is to secure exemptions from compliance with equality legislation for Christian (and other Faith) organisations and even individuals who, The Evangelical Alliance argues, ought to be allowed to discriminate against lesbians and gays if they can claim “Christian conscience” as a pretext.

Another Evangelical Alliance briefing refers to human rights legislation as an “imposition” on churches.

*“In the UK, recent years have seen various ‘conscience’ issues come to a head among evangelicals... Further instances would have to include the current efforts of evangelicals in mainline denominations to resist the endorsement of homosexual practice as acceptable for Christians, and the opposition mounted by CARE and others to the potential imposition on churches of human rights legislation which may, for example, oblige them to marry same-sex couples. In Jesmond, the homosexuality issue has been highlighted by two evangelical parishes refusing to admit the new Bishop of Newcastle on the grounds that he has expressed sympathy for gay partnerships.”*

[http://www.eauk.org/theology/key\\_papers/upload/PrivateJudgment.pdf](http://www.eauk.org/theology/key_papers/upload/PrivateJudgment.pdf)

In a 1998 document outlining The Evangelical Alliance’s position on homosexuality – entitled “*Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*” – which has governed its approach in opposing legislative progress towards gay and lesbian equality, The Evangelical Alliance states:

- We affirm that monogamous heterosexual marriage is the only form of partnership approved by God for full sexual relations today.
- We affirm God's love and concern for all humanity, including homosexual people, but believe homoerotic sexual practice to be incompatible with His will as revealed in Scripture.
- We oppose moves within certain churches to accept and/or endorse sexually active homosexual partnerships as a legitimate form of Christian relationship. We stand prayerfully with those in such churches who are seeking to resist these moves on biblical grounds.

- We call upon evangelical congregations to welcome and accept sexually active homosexual people, but to do so in the expectation that they will come in due course to see the need to change their lifestyle in accordance with biblical revelation and orthodox church teaching. We urge gentleness and patience in this process, and ongoing care even after a homosexual person renounces same-sex sexual relations.
- We commend the work of those organisations which seek to help homosexual Christians live a celibate life, and also commend those groups which responsibly assist homosexuals who wish to reorient to a heterosexual lifestyle.

**In other words, The Evangelical Alliance rejects any moves to recognise even faithful, monogamous homosexual partnerships, and supports those groups which seek to “cure” lesbians and gay men – the so called “ex-gay” movement, which has been roundly condemned by all leading health and psychiatric agencies as profoundly damaging to LGBT people.**

<http://www.eauk.org/theology/acute/faith-hope-homosexuality-conclusions.cfm>

These positions need to be contextualised. In another article featured on The Evangelical Alliance website entitled – “If Christians are supposed to love everyone, why do they hate homosexuals?” - the question is posed:

*Don't we need to catch up with the rest of society and stop being such prudes? Shouldn't Bible texts that speak against homosexual practice be taken as being in a particular cultural context which is completely irrelevant to a Western liberal society? It is argued that in a society where homosexual partnerships are culturally acceptable these texts simply do not apply anymore. They are out of date - and so the Church should catch up with the moral developments of the society it finds itself in.*

**The answer is, of course, a complete rejection of the notion that the Church should fall into step with society. Once again, this underscores Joel Edward's complete unsuitability for a formal role within the commission specifically charged with promoting social equality. The organisation he heads categorically does not believe in it.**

See: <http://www.eauk.org/resources/idea/bigquestion/archive/2004/bq3.cfm>

Therefore, what justification does the Minister for Women and Equality, Harriet Harman, have for appointing Joel Edwards as a Commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

This article above of course frames itself as promoting “love and tolerance” but it soon becomes clear that these are only tools with which to draw gay people close enough to the Church to brainwash them into psychologically damaging celibacy and “heterosexual conversion” programmes.

For an in-depth briefing on these damaging programmes, see:

<http://lgcm.org.uk/exgay/>

The danger of Joel Edwards's participation in the Equality Commission is demonstrated by his own words. In a communiqué on the issue of the Sexual Orientation Regulations, he says:

*Please pray for our future meetings with Government officials, as well as for opportunities to work critically, effectively and prophetically as 'good news' people for spiritual and social transformation.*

<http://www.eauk.org/sexual-orientation-regulations.cfm>

He reiterates this point in a letter to members:

*The Evangelical Alliance is committed to prophetic political engagement and welcomes the new level of political activity now evident across our membership.*

<http://www.eauk.org/sor-joel-letter.cfm>

Once again, it is quite clear that Joel Edwards and his organisation The Evangelical Alliance see themselves quite unashamedly as an agency for changing social policy and explore all "opportunities" to do so when they have The Evangelical Alliancer of the Government.

Giving Joel Edwards a formal role within the Equality Commission must be a dream come true – a prayer answered, if you will – by a fox asking for a management role in the henhouse.

The conservative Christian lobby – of which The Evangelical Alliance is a high profile component – blocks anti-discrimination measures designed to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people every step of the way. It is backed up by a group of affiliates, many of whom are worthy of a dossier of their own, such as **Christian Action Research Education (CARE)** which lobbies against gay rights and publishes antigay literature, including for schools; the **True Freedom Trust**, which is the leading (so-called "ex-gay" ministry in the UK, and the **Salvation Army**, which has threatened to close down services rather than comply with antidiscrimination policies.

<http://www.care.org.uk/>

<http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>

<http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/>

**Joel Edwards has never distanced The Evangelical Alliance from these affiliates or sought their disaffiliation, or, as far as we are aware rebuked them, or has suggested in any way that they are out of step with the parent organisation he leads. For lesbian and gay people, it is a poisonous alliance.**

The Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement published a far-ranging report on the issue of Christian Homophobia in November 2000

<http://www.lgcm.org.uk/press/press9.html>

The report demonstrated that

- The majority of homophobic abuse suffered by gay men and lesbians in the United Kingdom is supported by the words and actions of the Christian Churches
- That such homophobia has a serious and daily effect on the health and well-being of the gay and lesbian population of this country, sometimes leading to absence from work, depression, physical harm and even suicide
- That lesbian and gay church members are being expelled from congregations; lesbian and gay groups have been refused the use of church premises; church run welfare and housing organisations have specifically excluded gay men and lesbians.

**The Evangelical Alliance has done everything in its power to maintain this status quo.**

**Its leader, Joel Edwards, should not be an equality commissioner. It is a perverse insult to the LGBT community.**

**The Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement  
Monday 21 January 2008  
© 2008**

---

**LGCM, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London, E2 6HG, UK  
020 7739 1249 | [lgcm@lgcm.org.uk](mailto:lgcm@lgcm.org.uk) | [www.lgcm.org.uk](http://www.lgcm.org.uk)  
Registered Charity Number: 1048842**

## **Addendum 1**

### *Selected Quotes in the Media by Joel Edwards*

**“I think in the sex-obsession war, gay and lesbian people win hands down.”**

BBC Thought for the Day, 11 January 2007

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/programmes/thought/documents/t20070111.shtml>

**"I'm very saddened by a liberal push [over ordination of homosexuals] which has been fairly incessant for a long time.**

BBC Online, 8 August, 2003

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/3132467.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3132467.stm)

**“We cannot accept the contention that all references to homosexuality in the Bible are in the context of abusive relationships and are therefore irrelevant in the current debate.”**

Press Release, 6 March 2002

<http://www.changingattitude.org.uk/news/newsitem.asp?id=8>

**For the Rev Joel Edwards, the general director of the Evangelical Alliance, has been a vocal campaigner against legislation banning discrimination against gay men and women. Christians, he has said, do not want to find themselves "coerced" by law into aiding the promotion of homosexuality.**

The Independent, 13 December 2007

[http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/christina\\_patterson/article3138339.ece](http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/christina_patterson/article3138339.ece)

**“The issue of human sexuality for the Christian church in general, and for Anglicans in particular, will become the most divisive issue in the next ten years. It will become increasingly so for contemporary evangelicals below the age of 35 who will have less theological scruples about the issue of human sexuality than people like myself. According to our last survey, the EA is pretty solidly behind the historic Judaeo-Christian view of human sexuality. It would be very interesting to take a survey of evangelical opinion on the issue ten years from now.”**

**“We have concerns about [Rowan Williams’s] liberal response to the issue of human sexuality, and whilst there is at present only one example of him having agreed to the ordination of a gay priest in what he described as 'extenuating, unreasonable pastoral circumstances', that concerns us.”**

Jesus Life magazine

[http://www.jesus.org.uk/ja/mag\\_talkingto\\_edwards.shtml](http://www.jesus.org.uk/ja/mag_talkingto_edwards.shtml)

**Joel Edwards, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, said that the ruling [not to recognise the same-sex Canadian marriage between Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger as a legitimate marriage in the UK] upheld “Christian principals (sic).”**

**“The ruling affirms Christian principles and upholds the traditional Christian view of marriage and family life. Marriage is by definition a covenant relationship between one man and one woman. We are pleased that the High Court’s ruling acknowledges this.”**

Black Britain, 02/08/2006

<http://www.colourfulnetwork.net/print/?i=2238&c=News&n=bbo&a=>

## **Addendum 2**

In February 2007, more than 50 faith, inter-faith and non-faith organisations participated in the Faith, Homophobia & Human Rights conference in London. At the closing of the conference, they ratified with acclamation the following statement:

### ***A Statement from the Faith, Homophobia and Human Rights Conference***

*The Faith, Homophobia, & Human Rights Conference, gathered in London on 17th February 2007, calls on all people of goodwill, of whatever faith or none, to affirm and celebrate human equality in all its dimensions and particularly to work for the elimination of any faith-based homophobia and institutionalised prejudice towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.*

*We reject the activities of certain religious leaders, seeking exemptions from equality legislation, and attempts to base this on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, such a right being for all, not just for some. We deplore the internalised homophobia within religious institutions that fails to confront prejudice and hate. We encourage and support those faith organisations, which express their commitment to diversity and equality in practice and policy. We believe that full civil rights for LGBT individuals are not only consistent with the right to religious freedom, but are rooted in the best and fundamental teachings of all major faiths; love, justice, compassion, and mercy, such values being shared by all who seek the common good.*

*We call for further progressive public policy that will deliver comprehensive and effective anti-discrimination legislation, including positive duties, on the basis of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and belief. We call on the newly formed Commission for Equality and Human Rights to listen to the experience of LGBT faith networks and those who have suffered homophobia from and within religious organisations.*

*Today, the alliance of over fifty faith and secular organisations supporting this conference affirms and celebrates the values of human equality and social justice, rooted in the best of faith traditions, and shared by all who are committed to a fully human vision of a transformed society.*

The Evangelical Alliance had been asked to participate in the conference but it ignored the invitation. Nevertheless, many other mainstream Christian organisations felt able to participate and to endorse this very basic statement affirming the rights and dignity of LGBT people.

The Evangelical Alliance, of course, could not.