

Dear Mr. Bridge,

Thank you for your reply.

First, let me note that I am writing you “off the record.” My desire is that this situation be resolved privately and amicably, so please respect my wishes regarding confidence to that effect.

Before addressing the substance of your comments, I would like to make one comment of my own regarding your tone. Ordinarily, I am not at all one to be concerned with worldly formalities, but in this case, I think the fact that I went on to earn a DPhil is of significance—it establishes my standing as an accepted and respected member of the community of scholars. At the time of the “incident,” I was seen as just another graduate student, and because of that, I was in a rather defenseless and powerless position—I would think anyone still human might understand, even if imaginatively, the unpleasantness of having a nasty article read by thousands of people, knowing there is essentially nothing you could do at the time but bear the brunt of the mob, while dozens of your friends and colleagues shun you based on what you knew were lies. Since then, thankfully, I have produced some notable work as a philosopher, and I am quickly establishing a reputation as one of the foremost junior scholars in the field of phenomenology. Thus, while I typically would pay no attention to the function of honorifics, the fact that I signed my closing by referring to myself as “Dr.” was not incidental—it is a real reminder of how much has changed since the original appearing of the articles in question. Why you should have nevertheless chosen to address me as “Mr.” is therefore revealing. Either you did so out of sheer carelessness, or else it was not mere carelessness. If your use of the incorrect title was just a mistake, then the fact that you are apparently inept in basic norms of professional address casts justifiable doubt on your credibility as a serious reporter. If your decision to refer to me as “Mr.” was done in deliberate violation of those norms, then apparently you are willing to personally slight me, when I have done nothing to personally wrong you. That you would return my sincere graciousness with haughty snark is telling. If so, it would suggest that you are acting with malice. I have always firmly believed that those who supplied comment to the *Cherwell* article were themselves motivated by malice; I would like to believe that you weren’t similarly motivated in publishing yours.

You say that the two statements on my website do nothing to challenge the charge that I behaved “very verbally abusive, homophobic [sic], sexist, and ableist.” That is odd. The student statement explicitly emphasizes that I was *not* abusive or aggressive. If that is not evidence I did not behave abusively, what would be? I suppose that you think you are being careful when you added the qualifier “may have.” But that really will do you no good here. While everyone may agree that such a standard was legitimate during the original situation when things were arguably somewhat ambiguous, that is no longer the case. I have just supplied you with significant documentation and other facts that decisively rebut the idea that I did what I was alleged to have done. The fact that the information I have supplied at the very least casts serious doubt on the original claims, and yet you are still in favor of keeping up the article is very strange. Why would you be so defensive over an article that appeared two years ago concerning events that occurred

while I was still a student and which no longer seem to matter. I have to say that you appear to be reasoning about this from a rather petty perspective.

In any case, it should be noted that the second student statement you have not seen (but Christ Church has) corroborates the first statement. Surely that might give you reason to reconsider whether what you were originally told by your sources was true. As for the Dean's statement, I think you underestimate its significance. You seem to assume that someone of his position would naturally come to the aid of the Christian; why you would think that I'm not sure. But setting aside that rather bizarre assumption, I have to say that I'm sorry to see you apparently have not taken the time to investigate the matter further. Dean Percy has long been an outspoken supporter of the LGBT movement, and he is not at all sympathetic to my orthodox convictions on matters of sexual morality.¹ Thus, rather than assuming that his occupying the post he has is reason for dismissing his statement of sympathy, the nature of his biography and views on the contrary underscore its profound significance.

Your reaction to these statements touches on a more general point I should like to highlight. As a former longtime student and now published philosopher, I have never ceased to be amazed by a paradox: very often, intelligent people come to believe very foolish and ignorant things precisely because they are so intelligent. In their self-assurance, they wrongly assume that their assumptions are trustworthy without further scrutiny. When they fail to reflect on their presuppositions, they are often led astray. That is what has happened here in your case, I believe. If you had paused to question your own presuppositions, you might have taken the time to see whether or not the Dean holds the sort of views you assume he does, only to discover that he does not.

As for the question of testimonial evidence, I think the facts are indeed on my side. To begin with, one of the three key "witnesses" quoted in the *Cherwell* was *not* a witness. Surely the testimony of two independent people who were actually present should trump the testimony of someone who was not party to the events in question, and who has an established relationship with the *Cherwell*. I would add that perhaps the most inflammatory claim made against me—that what I did was a "hate crime"—was made by this same person. Such an accusation is an extremely serious one with profound connotations and lasting repercussions; that someone who was not even witness to the events would say such a thing, and that you would still lend credence to it despite the contradictory evidence marshalled against it, is very irresponsible from a journalistic standpoint, and perhaps even vicious from a human one.

Having said something about the epistemic norms of testimony, I think it bears mentioning the issue of language. Extraordinarily, you claim that regardless of my tone or demeanor, the mere fact that I said homosexual behavior is sinful is itself "aggressive" and "threatening." First, I do not believe it is fair to brush aside the importance of my tone or demeanor during the event in question. That I was restrained, composed, and calm cannot be said of those who confronted me. They were hostile, loud, snarky, and vulgar. In ordinary language, words such as "aggressive" and "threatening" and "abusive" carry the very connotation you are deliberately discounting; on any natural understanding of those terms, it is simply false to claim I behaved that way. If those

who provided comment to the *Cherwell* intended their remarks to be understood in light of some specialist vocabulary that only adepts will know to decrypt, they should have explicitly said so. Otherwise, saying what they did would mislead any reasonable reader, who has not yet been initiated into their private language. As it happens, it was those who are quoted in the *Cherwell* whose actions satisfy the description of what we normally mean by “aggressive” and “threatening” behavior. Why you are apparently unconcerned with those revelations, even after reading the statements in question, strikes me as odd. I think one is well within one’s rights to see your reaction as unmistakable evidence of bias. It suggests that you did not write your article in good faith. If you had, you should presently be alarmed to learn of the information you just have. The fact you aren’t speaks volumes. Given the blatant hypocrisy at work here, I have to say that perhaps you and others are not so much set on promoting tolerance and justice so much as you are set on silencing Christians. One way to do this, of course, is to simply define, by fiat, the words of the Holy Scriptures as hate speech, thereby rendering them illegal. This is very Orwellian. Thankfully, you are not yet there. At least for now, I enjoy a legal right to obey Christ and to express my faith. My words are not illegal, and you have no moral authority to police those with whom you disagree into silence.

Let me address some of the other details you mention, even if just in passing: I did not have a sign on or with me during the situation in question. I had left the sign at the base of the flag days previously, and it had already been removed before the “incident” in question; hence, there can be no question as to whether having such a sign in one’s possession is (or is not) “aggressive”: I simply didn’t have one on me. In any case, if you think displaying a sign were itself aggressive behavior, I may hope your opinion doesn’t win the day. If it does, that means free-speech and intellectual freedom will have fallen on hard times. Are we to say that political protesters must be dispersed because they are marching with signs? I think such an idea is ludicrous, as I assume you will too. But if you agree, I don’t see how it’s consistent of you to turn around and fixate on the question of the sign I left—you might not like what it says, but the simple fact that I displayed it cannot not itself be dismissed as “aggressive.” Furthermore, as the student statement rightly noted, the act of flying the rainbow flag is itself a charged political and theological statement. I disagree with that message, but by your standards, I would be entitled to claim that it is aggressive behavior simply for having flown it.

I think we should be honest, then, about who is really aggressive, or who are the oppressors. I do not believe that anyone at Christ Church has to live in fear knowing that, if their view of liberation is discovered, they may well be slandered and thrown out of College, libeled in the press, accused of criminal behavior, shunned by his colleagues, and then blackballed from his chosen profession. That, however, is the reality facing Christians such as myself all around the world. It is a testament to how out of touch you are that you would deploy the victim card on me, as though I was the one wielding the power. Second, I was not *preaching*. There is a very obvious difference between preaching and holding a conversation. The fact that you continue to characterize my speech act as an instance of the former rather than the latter is misleading and at this point bordering on deceitful. For what it’s worth, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with preaching, but we needn’t enter into that debate here, because it’s irrelevant: I wasn’t preaching. Third, as both statements you have now seen explain, I was the one approached and mobbed by the people who subsequently complained to the *Cherwell*. The people with whom I was originally speaking did not file a complaint. In fact, it was one of their own statement which led

the Senior Censor to say that he would be expecting a complaint from me! You ask why, if I was not approaching others, why they approached me: the answer is detailed by the student statement, which describes how my conversation was invaded by an organized mob that amassed from the Library and elsewhere. You mention that the statement you've read only addresses the first "ten to fifteen" minutes of the incident; that may be true, but it is moot. As that statement mentions, the other student statement was written by someone who was present for the entire "incident." You mention that there are "many, many" students at Christ Church whose testimony supports your narrative. I think that's inaccurate in at least two key respects. First, if you mean to use the *Cherwell* article itself as proof, it bears noting once again that there are only three students quoted, one of whom was not even there. I supplied two eyewitness statements to the Censors, so in case we're counting, the weight of testimony is dead even. Then of course there's the fact that the student statement you have read specifically explains that there are many others who could corroborate my accounting of the facts, but they did not so because they were intimidated into silence. They were fearful that they would receive the same treatment I did; given the treatment I received, their fear was not misplaced. Thus, whatever "consensus" you may wish to appeal to was in fact manufactured by the same campaign of intimidation I myself was subjected to on the day of the incident.

Finally, and I should have thought this would go without saying, but you have overlooked one crucial piece of testimony, namely, my own. I have consistently maintained that the allegations printed about me were false. Unless you believe I am lying or that I am for some other reason fundamentally mistaken about the events in question, I fail to see why you would discount my own account.

My word is true. I therefore hope you will do me the service of deleting the article.

Yours sincerely,

Steven DeLay

ⁱ See, for instance, <http://modernchurch.org.uk/news-blog/senior-cleric-calls-for-canterbury-apology>, or <http://www.virtueonline.org/pro-homosexual-church-england-dean-spins-smyth-report-blacken-evangelicals>, or <http://modernchurch.org.uk/2016/january-2016/906-sexuality-and-the-citizenship-of-heaven>.