Clergy Discipline Measure 2003

In the Clergy Discipline Tribunal – Diocese of Winchester

Re the Reverend Dr Stephen Robert Sizer

WITNESS STATEMENT OF
MIRANDA PINCH

I, **MIRANDA PINCH**, of 7 Down Gate, Alresford, Hampshire, SO24 9JB, WILL SAY as follows:

1. I make this statement on behalf of the Reverend Dr Stephen Sizer ("Stephen")in support of his Answer to a Complaint made against him by the Board of Deputies of British Jews ("the Board of Deputies").

Biography

2. My mother was a Jewish secular holocaust survivor. She fled Czechoslovakia in 1938. Ernst Sommer, her father, was a writer and magistrate and on the Nazi death list, so they left early on. Other members of the family perished at Auschwitz and Theresienstadt, losing everything. My mother married a non-Jew in London. I was not brought up within the Jewish religion. She was both scared and ashamed of being Jewish. Scared because of her experiences and ashamed because of what was being done in her name in Palestine, as a Jew.

3. I am a British secular Jew who is now a practicing Christian. I was not converted from Judaism. I became a churchgoer where I lived well before I became a Christian. My friends were Christian. There was no alternative! However, over the years, I have fully embraced a liberal Christianity and become a committed and active member of the Anglican church.

(Until my retirement I worked for the Hampshire County Council as a qualified Social Worker as a Shared Lives Manager)

4. I became deeply involved in the quest for human rights, international law and equality in the region in 2009 when I spent 3 months in Hebron with a small international team under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. We monitored the situation and accompanied children and adults through checkpoints and in areas where there was aggression toward them by settlers supported by Israeli forces. I then returned to Israel and Palestine every year and took on a number of voluntary roles to educate and advocate in that arena.

5. Between 2017 and 2019 I produced a film, "*From Balfour to Banksy*", www.balfourtobanksy.com. Although it questions the actions of Israel on occupied Palestinian land, and its discriminatory policies towards Palestinians in general, the film is an attempt to support the goals of peace and reconciliation in Israel and Palestine. The film does not question or oppose the existence of the State of Israel and I have stated explicitly and strenuously my opposition to any form of anti-Semitism.

The Board of Deputies

6. The Board of Deputies is a self-appointed representative of all British Jews which exists, inter alia, to promote a sympathetic understanding of Israel. In reality, it does not represent the Jewish community in the United Kingdom. The Jewish community, like the Christian community, is very diverse with a broad range of views. There are many within the Jewish Diaspora who utterly condemn the actions of the State of Israel and are appalled by the mendacious intimidation and harassment by some parts of the Jewish community, including the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Chronicle, who are attempting to discredit those who stand up for human rights and international law for all within Israel and Palestine – Jew, Muslim and Christian alike.

7. The fact that my mother was a Holocaust survivor has not prevented accusations of Holocaust denial being direct against me. I have also fallen foul of criticism for publishing a perfectly acceptable article because it was deemed (by some) to have come from a disreputable source. This is an argument of taint by source, which is illogical and

incoherent. It is used by the Board of Deputies. As most publications have at some time or another contained views contrary to today's sensitive perspectives, if this criteria of criticism had any force, it would make it near impossible to re-publish anything. I would find it difficult to avoid publishing any articles that would not be criticised by the Board of Deputies. A few years back, I had to use this argument in my defence in an exchange with the Jewish Chronicle. Thankfully I escaped with an only slightly damaging on-line article about me.

8. A number of people, including myself, have been accused of anti-Semitism based on the perception of a group of individuals, such as representatives of the Board of Deputies. If perception alone were the criteria for guilt then there could no longer be free speech or proper debate on any subjects that create strong emotions and divergent perspectives. It would be the death knell to democracy.

9. A number of people, including Stephen, have also been accused of anti-Semitism based on guilt by association. This is also deeply problematic. Every panel or conference I have ever attended has involved debate and debate is not possible without a variety of different opinions being expressed. The suggestion that I should avoid any platform with someone who is considered by some to have a disagreeable perspective would close down all debate. Take parliamentarians as an example. Most prefer diplomacy to conflict. Diplomacy entails engaging with people with whom one disagrees. As a result, most politicians will regularly share a platform with those who are labelled as despots, terrorists or law breakers. To suggest that the politicians are guilty by association is illogical. It is not possible to temper or change the views of others without active engagement with them.

10. I can give a specific example of where Stephen was accused of sharing a platform with Gilad Atzmon, when he did not even attend the conference in question. In November 2019 Stephen was due to speak at a conference in Chester. (My film was shown just before the start of the conference, so I was indirectly involved). The organiser decided to invite Gilad Atzmon at the last minute for a different day to Stephen, but Stephen bowed out as soon as he was informed that Gilad had been invited. The Jewish

Chronicle still accused Stephen of sharing the stage despite his principled lack of attendance!

11. I am often accused of guilt by association. I write parliamentary questions for Baroness Tonge to submit in the House of Lords. Although the accusation of antisemitism levelled at her has never been proven and, in fact she was even publicly found innocent by a House of Lords committee on one occasion, I am accused of antisemitism, just for being associated with her. I am also told that my Jewish friends are antisemites as some belong to Jewish Voice for Labour and therefore I must be as well.

IHRA definition of anti-Semitism

12. Many find the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism problematic, especially because of the examples given, which some accept to be part of the definition. For this reason, and in order to protect free speech and legitimate criticism of Israel, the British Parliament's Home Affairs Select Committee attached the following caveats to its 2016 report on anti-Semitism:

"It is not anti-Semitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic intent.

It is not anti-Semitic to hold the Israeli Government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government's policies or actions, without evidence to suggest anti-Semitic intent."

13. It is my personal view that the conflation of the policies and actions of the State of Israel with Judaism is the greatest antisemitism, as it goes against the very essence of mercy and justice at Judaism's heart and by promoting the idea that they are one and the same, it increases antisemitic incidents.

Stephen and anti-Semitism

14. I have known Stephen for many years through our human rights work. Over the years we have both worked with and alongside UK Jewish groups as well as Israeli Jewish

human rights activists. Stephen works tirelessly for human rights and international law and, as an Anglican priest, his words, written and spoken have always been in line with Christian teachings of love and inclusivity. I have never heard any statement nor observed any action from Stephen that could be considered in any way anti-Semitic.

15. The orchestrated campaign against Stephen is not becoming of any person or institution that upholds democracy, free speech, human rights and international law. It is harassment and intimidation which runs counter to the very values that the United Kingdom and the Church of England hold dear.

16. Stephen has worked tirelessly to bring peace and reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians in Israel and Palestine. He believes that the way forward is for Israel to end their illegal occupation and dismantle the walls they have erected to separate themselves from the Palestinians. There are many Jews, both in Israel and elsewhere, who believe the same way, and espouse the same cause as Stephen Sizer and are accused of antisemitism. The Israeli Jewish Haaretz newspaper frequently publishes articles and comments that are far more extreme than any expressed by those accused of antisemitism in this country.

Statement of truth

I believe the facts and matters in this statement to be true.



MIRANDA PINCH

Date: 17.10.20