



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Former Conservative Party chairman Lord Tebbit snubs Sunday services conducted by a gay dean the Tory peer has branded a 'sodomite'

Lord Tebbit is boycotting the cathedral near him in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

His comments were condemned, with calls for him to be expelled from the party

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Lord Tebbit has provoked outrage by vowing to boycott services conducted by a gay dean the Tory peer has branded a 'sodomite'.

The former Conservative Party chairman has been attending the cathedral near his home in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, for nine years but has told The Mail on Sunday he will no longer go there when the recently appointed Rev Canon Joe Hawes is officiating.

The 87-year-old Tory grandee is adamant that the canon of St Edmundsbury Cathedral is a 'sodomite' – a biblical term seen as unacceptable by gay people.

Lord Tebbit said: 'I find it difficult to accept a sodomite as a member of the clergy who will, for example, be called upon to conduct marriage services. I will struggle to attend if he is officiating.'

His comments were condemned last night, with one prominent gay Conservative calling for him to be thrown out of the party.

Lord Tebbit said he had discovered from a newsletter in March that the canon, 52, who is in a civil partnership with another cleric, the Rev Chris Eyden, was to become the cathedral's most senior official.

He said: 'The cathedral has taken this decision and I disapprove of it but I do not wish to damage the cathedral in any way. I will maintain my financial support for it every year because it will be there long after the dean and I are gone.'

The former Cabinet Minister was an outspoken critic of the Coalition Government's introduction of same-sex marriages in 2014.

He said he and his severely disabled wife Margaret, paralysed in the 1984 Brighton bombing, had attended services 'fairly frequently' since they moved nine years ago to their three-storey Georgian home near the cathedral in the middle of the market town.

He said he did not know if other worshippers shared his views: 'Most will shrug their shoulders and move on as they won't want to lay themselves open to criticism that they are homophobes.'

Last night, Ivan Massow, the gay former Tory London Mayoral hopeful, called on Lord Tebbit to be expelled from the Tory Party: 'Theresa May needs to do that. You can't hold Jeremy Corbyn to account for anti-Semitism and not hold your own party to account.'

Tory MP Crispin Blunt, who is gay and chairs the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, said: 'I expect St Edmundsbury Cathedral will bear its loss with equanimity. Lord Tebbit may have a disagreeable surprise at how many cathedrals he has self-excluded himself from.'

The gay Labour MP Chris Bryant, a former Church of England clergyman, said Lord Tebbit's Christianity was 'skin deep' and he despaired when people could not see 'beyond their own blinkers'. He told the peer: 'Get on your bike, my dear, and have another gin.'

A spokesman for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich added: 'It has been clear for more than a decade that clergy are entitled to be within civil partnerships. Lord Tebbit is welcome to his views.'



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Under Church of England rules, gay clergy who enter into civil partnerships should remain celibate but are banned from same-sex marriages. The issue has caused deep divisions within Anglicanism.