

Swedish preacher who called gays 'cancerous' is acquitted on appeal: Sermon ruled personal interpretation of the Bible

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A Swedish preacher sentenced to a month in prison for referring to homosexuals as a “cancerous tumor” in society has been acquitted by an appeals court. The court in Jonkoping, in southern Sweden, ruled that a sermon by Ake Green, 63, was not an attack on gays and lesbians because it was a personal interpretation of the Bible.

The court said it “strongly questioned” Green's comments, but a stringent hate crime law under which the preacher was convicted last year should not be used to stifle discussion about homosexuality in churches and other public places.

“There is nothing that points to that fact that the pastor used the pulpit to attack homosexuals,” read the verdict of February 11. “This falls outside of punishment for violating the law against hate against a group.”

The case, which attracted international attention, could still move to the Supreme Court in Sweden. Green told Ecumenical News International that he received encouragement from Christians in the U.S. and Poland.

The hate crime law was initially designed to protect racial and religious groups, among others. In 2003 it was changed to include homosexuals. But many in Sweden thought Green’s case was not a worthy application of the law.

Archbishop K. G. Hammar of the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden said that making the Pentecostal pastor a “martyr” would create more support for his views. “The biblical language of Ake Green should be thrown onto the rubbish heap of history,” the archbishop said in a statement. *—Religion News Service*