

James MacDonald Sues Radio Host 'Mancow' for Defamation

Former Harvest Bible Chapel pastor James MacDonald is suing Chicago radio personality Erich "Mancow" Muller for defamation after Muller used his radio show to—in the host's words—"bring down the cult of MacDonald."

MacDonald was fired from the Chicago-area megachurch in February after Muller aired clips of a recording of purported remarks by MacDonald in which he allegedly insulted critics, including freelance journalist Julie Roys and several people associated with *Christianity Today*.

Both *Christianity Today* and Roys (for both *World* magazine and her own website) have reported on controversy at Harvest surrounding MacDonald's leadership.

In the lawsuit filed Thursday (Dec. 12) in Cook County Circuit Court, MacDonald is seeking more than \$50,000 in damages. The suit accuses Muller and Cumulus Media—which airs "Mancow" on WLS 890-AM — of multiple counts of defamation, intentional infliction of emotional distress, eavesdropping and more.

As a result, according to the lawsuit, "MacDonald sustained injury to his reputation, humiliation, anxiety, embarrassment, mental anguish, the termination of his position as senior pastor of HBC and monetary damages."

It points not only to the recording Muller aired but also to instances on his show when Muller called the pastor a "con man" and "big fake," as well as allegations Muller made on the radio accusing MacDonald of planning to put child pornography on Muller's computer and asking Muller to find a hitman for him, among other things.

This isn't MacDonald's first lawsuit.

When the pastor complained about Roys' reporting, it was Muller himself who passed along the name of his lawyer.

Harvest filed suit against Roys, along with the bloggers behind the Elephant's Debt and their wives. Not long after Harvest dropped the suit, it suspended and then fired MacDonald.

Muller has said he attended Harvest for years and once considered the church's pastor a friend, even vacationing with MacDonald. He later began to believe the church's critics and has become one of MacDonald's most vocal critics, both on his radio show and in a scathing op-ed he wrote for the Daily Herald, a suburban Chicago newspaper.

"For me this has always been about trying to help people and trying to expose a bad guy," Muller told Chicago media columnist Robert Feder.

"For years I had endorsed (McDonald) and his church. When I found out the truth, I felt it was my duty to tell my listeners."

It's not the first time Muller has been sued by someone he targeted on his show, either. The suit notes Muller and his employers previously had been sued by former Chicago Bears player Keith Van Horne and by the wife of another Chicago radio personality.

It also accuses Muller and Cumulus of violating Illinois eavesdropping laws by airing the recording of purported remarks by MacDonald.

And it accuses Cumulus of "reckless hiring" in employing Muller after his previous controversies and of failing to properly supervise his show.

A report released by Harvest last month details MacDonald's "powerful and subversive leadership style," his development of

an inner circle of leaders through which he could control the church, his marginalization of the church's elders and other leaders and "aggressive tactics" by the former pastor.

The church and MacDonald currently are in arbitration over his firing and the ownership of former radio show and ministry "Walk in the Word," which aired the pastor's sermons. {eo}

The Associated Press