



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Free Presbyterian Church advert breached "code"

A report appeared on the BBC NI news website (Dec 3-08) which said

Church gay advert breached codes. A newspaper ad placed by Sandown Free Presbyterian church in Belfast breached advertising codes, the Advertising Standards Authority has ruled.

The advert was published in the News Letter in August and referred to homosexuality as an "abomination".

The ASA said the ad had caused "serious offence" to some readers and particular care should be taken in the future.

However, it did not uphold a complaint that the advert was likely to provoke violence or anti-social behaviour.

The minister of Sandown, Reverend David McIlveen, said they did the right thing. "We've no apology for the statement that we made and we believe that it was necessary for us as a church to make a statement on what the Bible teaches about sodomy," he said. "We cannot apologise for the teaching of the Bible - it is a statement of faith, it was not done to deliberately inflame people but we recognise by the very nature of the Bible's message it does bring offence for certain people."

Rev McIlveen responds

In response to the ruling, the Minister of the Sandown Free Presbyterian Church, Rev David McIlveen, has accused the Advertising Standards Authority of putting his church on trial.

Mr McIlveen, whose church in Belfast placed the advert in the "News Letter" the day before the annual Belfast "Gay Pride Parade", claimed the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) was setting "a very dangerous precedent" by requiring that regulators give permission before portions of the Bible can be published.

The advert was entitled The Word of God Against Sodomy and quoted from biblical passages.

In August several complaints had been lodged with the watchdog about the full page 540-word advert.

The ad described homosexuality as an abomination, defined homosexuals as perverts and called on religious followers to maintain a very public stance against the gay community in defiance of the parade.

The ad appeared on Friday, August 1, following months of controversy surrounding com-



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ments made by DUP MP Iris Robinson. The ASA said it received seven complaints from individuals who thought the advertisement was homophobic and was likely to provoke hatred and violence against the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Following a four month investigation, the body concluded that the advertisement was indeed homophobic and therefore breached clause 5.1 of the CAP Code (decency). However, it said the advertisement was unlikely to provoke hatred or violence.

It has ordered that the ad not appear in its current form again and requested the church seek advice or approval from the body before publishing any other ads of that nature.

The Rev David McIlveen said that while he was pleased the ASA had upheld the church's position that it did not promote hatred or violence he disputed it breached the decency clause. He argued that the church had the right to print the ad because someone had displayed a placard saying Jesus was a homosexual at last year's Gay Pride parade.

Rev McIlveen said in a interview with a Belfast newspaper: "In an effort to show that we have breached that code they highlighted the text we used from Leviticus Ch 18 v 22. Our determination from that is that you can not quote scripture because it is deemed as offensive. Well, we see this as a serious offence."

Mr McIlveen also defended the language used in the ad saying that people in Northern Ireland would be "familiar" with it in light of the long-running radio debate over the summer. He also questioned the ASA's credibility, arguing that seven complaints did not mean a majority of readers.

A spokeswoman from the ASA defended its decision saying that the body only needs one complaint to launch an investigation and can make a ruling based on this one complaint. She said this was to prevent further offence if the ad had deemed to be offensive.

Serious Crime!



Mrs. Iris Robinson,
M.P.

Meanwhile, officers from the PSNI's serious crime branch are carrying out interviews as part of an investigation into DUP MP Iris Robinson's controversial remarks over homosexuality, the "Belfast Telegraph" has reported.

The First Minister's wife caused a storm when she told the House of Commons, during a debate on the assessment and management of sex offenders, that "there can be no viler act, apart from homosexuality and sodomy, than sexually abusing innocent children".

Her comments were made just days after she told a radio programme that homosexuality was an abomination and that gay people could be "cured".

The Belfast Telegraph has learned that serious crime branch detectives have been carrying out active inquiries into the remarks following a number of complaints about incitement to



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hatred.

It is believed police are investigating if the remarks contravened Article 9 of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 by using threatening, abusive or insulting words which have the likelihood to stir up hatred and arouse fear.

The Belfast Telegraph understands media organisations have been approached this week for assistance in the inquiry.

Legal sources last night said it would be normal practice for police to carry out inquiries following complaints from the public.

It is not known whether Mrs Robinson has yet been spoken to. A DUP spokesman said last night: "The DUP is committed to equality and fairness for everyone in Northern Ireland. Our record in government shows that we are working hard to bring the maximum benefits of devolution to all of Northern Ireland's people regardless of their background.

"Our elected representatives will fulfil all the legal requirements of office and will oppose discrimination against any section of the community but maintain the right of everyone to hold and express their views freely on moral issues according to their conscience."

Calls were made for Mrs Robinson's resignation from public office following her comments in the House of Commons earlier this year.

When asked to clarify the remarks she said that homosexuality was "comparable" to child abuse.

As the storm over her comments began to grow she made an apparent U-turn stating that the recording of the debate, which has been published on the Hansard website, did not accurately reflect her views.

In a statement issued through the DUP press office she added: "I clearly intended to say that child abuse was worse even than homosexuality and sodomy At no point have I set out to suggest homosexuality was worse than child sex abuse."

But a Hansard official said that after checking audio recordings, she was satisfied the comments were reported accurately.

Days earlier Mrs Robinson told a radio show that the act of homosexuality was an abomination and that gay people can be "cured".

Her husband, First Minister Peter Robinson, has stood by his wife.