

On the International Scene



Pope faces lawsuit in Germany for not wearing seatbelt

FREIBURG, Germany - Dogan News Agency
The spiritual leader of the Catholic world is facing a German lawsuit for failing to wear a seatbelt during his visit to the country in September.

Freiburg municipality confirmed the lawsuit on Nov. 26.

A German citizen from the city of Dortmund filed a complaint against Pope Benedict XVI, saying the head of the Catholic church did not put on his seatbelt while strolling around the city of Freiburg in his "Popemobile" during his visit on Sept. 24-25.

The plaintiff, whose name was not disclosed, named Baden-Württemberg Minister-President Winfried Kretschmann and Archbishop Rober Zolltisch as witnesses in the case and asked that they provide testimonies.

"Seatbelts save lives and the Pope should obey the traffic rules," the plaintiff said, adding that a driver was killed in a traffic accident shortly after the Pope's visit for failing to wear a seatbelt.

[www.HurriyetDailyNews.com]

Gay Humanists challenge 'conversion therapy' and condemn 'gaystapo' slurs

Journalist and campaigner Patrick Strudwick condemned the role of religious groups in their promotion of "conversion therapy", during a speech at the annual fundraising lunch of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) in Central London on Saturday, Nov. 12. He also criticized a Church of England newspaper article for equating gay and Humanist campaigners with Nazis.

Strudwick was presented with the GALHA Humanist Campaigns Award for his work campaigning against "conversion therapy". GALHA, a member organization of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), has promoted Humanism and LGBT rights for more than 30 years, both in the UK and internationally.

The GALHA audience was shocked by Strudwick's chilling account of the way in which therapists

had tried to undermine his sexual identity by their insistence that homosexuality was an illness which they could cure and "pray for". In the course of his undercover investigation it had become clear that vulnerable LGBT people were being undermined by therapy which had no credible theoretical base. Strudwick went on to describe his long struggle to get the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy and British Medical Council to condemn "conversion therapy".

Derek Lennard, GALHA Campaigns and Events Coordinator said that "Some GALHA members experienced aversion therapy and other repressive techniques in the 1950s and 1960s. We are fully committed to exposing 'conversion therapies' to the wider public, and to ensuring that bodies such as the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy and the General Medical Council are made fully aware that these dreadful homophobic practices are unacceptable to our community".

"Gaystapo"

Strudwick also responded to the description of him and other LGBT campaigners as "members of the Gaystapo". In a Church of England newspaper article, Alan Craig, leader of the Christian Peoples Alliance party and a former London councilor, used a series of Nazi metaphors describing "gay-rights stormtroopers" crushing people "under the pink jackboot" and warning that while "the gay Wehrmacht is on its long march through the institutions... it's only 1938 and Nazi expansionist ambitions are far from sated." Mr. Craig goes on to suggest he can play a Winston Churchill role in "forcefully confronting the vaulting ambitions of gay leaders and their atheist and humanist fellow-travellers."

Strudwick told the GALHA meeting that members of religious organisations were stirring up hatred against gay people and often justifying this with religious and therapeutic rhetoric.

[www.iheu.org/trackback/4251]



Vatican takes legal action over Benetton pope kiss ad [Reuters.com]

The Vatican said on Thursday [Nov. 17] it would take legal action to stop the distribution of a photo montage in an advertisement by the Italian fashion firm Benetton showing Pope Benedict kissing an imam on the mouth.

A statement said the Vatican had told its lawyers in Italy and around the world to “take the proper legal measures” to stop the use of the photo, even in the media.

It was not clear from the statement if the Vatican intended to sue Benetton directly for damages.

The statement said the ad was “damaging to not only to dignity of the pope and the Catholic Church but also to the feelings of believers.”

Benetton said on Wednesday night that it was withdrawing the advertisement, part of the firm’s latest

shock campaign, in which a number of world leaders are seen kissing each other on the mouth in photo montages.

The withdrawal came after the Vatican issued an initial protest which called the use of the unauthorised and “manipulative” use of the pope’s picture in the photo montage totally unacceptable.

“This is a grave lack of respect for the pope, an offence against the sentiments of the faithful and a clear example of how advertising can violate elementary rules of respect for people in order to attract attention through provocation,” spokesman Father Federico Lombardi said on Wednesday night.

A large banner with the image of the pope and the imam was hung from a bridge near the Vatican on Wednesday morning but later removed.

But on Thursday morning the picture was still on the window of a store in the square at Rome’s Trevi Fountain, one of the most popular tourist sites in Rome.

The photo montage of the pope

kissing the imam on the mouth was still widely available on the internet on Thursday morning.

In its statement announcing the withdrawal of the ad, Benetton said the purpose of its campaign was “exclusively to fight the culture of hate in every form” but said it had nonetheless decided to withdraw the image.

“We are sorry that the use of an image of the pontiff and the imam should have offended the sensibilities of the faithful in this way,” it said in a statement.

Other photo montages in the same campaign, in which Benetton says it supports the Unhate Foundation, show other world leaders kissing each other on the mouth.

U.S. President Barack Obama is shown kissing Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in one.

The Italian clothing company has run controversial advertising campaigns in the past, including one that showed grieving parents at the bedside of a man dying of AIDS. (Reporting By Philip Pullella; Editing by Tim Pearce)