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ABORTION

England, 100 pounds for the right to life

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

17_11_2023

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A disappointing “case adjourned” concluded the long awaited hearing at Poole Magistrate’s Court, against army veteran Adam Smith-Connor, yesterday, 16 November. “I’m sorry that I’ve been unable to proceed but for various reasons, it hasn’t. I have fixed a trial date which I am told is suitable for all parties that is on January 18,” stated the district judge on duty. Mr Smith-Connor, accused of not paying a fixed penalty fine of £100 for praying silently outside an abortion clinic in a buffer zone in Bournemouth last November, 2022, will now have to wait another three months for his case to be heard and resolved.

Officially, the hearing did not go ahead as planned due to logistical reasons. The in-depth discussions between lawyers on the legal technicalities of the case frittered away the court's time, inducing the judge to block two full days at the same court on January 18, 2024. Until that date, Mr Connor Smith who is being supported by [Alliance Defending Freedom](#) (ADF), is released on bail.

And herein lies the first curiosity: a court case, that was expected to be resolved in three hours, has now been accommodated two full days of court time in the new year. Notably, the second day, 19 January, is at disposition for a trial and judgment, should the judge based on the hearing decide there is a case against Mr Smith-Connor. And herein, lies the second curiosity: why a relatively minor offence suddenly warrants this unprecedented upgrade. Identical cases in the past, which involved Isabel Vaughan-Spruce and Father Sean McGough accused of the same "offence", praying in silence and refusing to pay the statutory fine, were dismissed within minutes at Birmingham Magistrate's Court due to lack of evidence. Despite this, the Bournemouth judge confirmed Adam's case requires a thorough investigation.

So let's recall what this army veteran did, who fought in Afghanistan to defend fundamental democratic values, to merit this preferential treatment. Adam Smith-Connor from Marchwood in Southampton UK, was stopped twice in the same week for praying in silence outside BPAS clinic on Ophir Road in Bournemouth. On the first occasion, the local police officers who questioned Mr Smith-Connor, informed him he was not breaking the law. "This is England", "what you are doing is legal", they told him when he replied, "I am praying silently for my son Jacob who died in an abortion". Based on the assurance that silent prayer was legal, Mr Smith-Connor returned to pray outside the same clinic, the following week on 24 November 2022. In this instance, he was questioned by Community Safety Accredited Scheme officers (CSAS), about the nature of his thoughts. Mr Smith-Connor told the officials he was praying for his son Jacob, who had died in an abortion, exactly as he had done a week earlier.

Much to Mr Smith-Connor's surprise, the Community officers informed him that standing still and thinking silent prayers, breached the PSPO buffer zone law. On this basis, they asked him to leave the area. But, Mr Smith-Connor confident that his behaviour was legitimate was reluctant to comply. The officers then issued him the £100 fixed penalty notice stating it was justified by "the [invisible and inaudible] prayer that you've admitted to." Mr Smith-Connor's refusal to pay the fine is the basis for the hearing that has been adjourned to January 2024.

Jeremiah Igunnubole who is defending Mr Smith-Connor responded to the accusation by making “an application for abuse of process” to the courts. Essentially, the case is “fundamentally unfair” and “should never have gone to court in the first place”, he argues. Mr Smith-Connor, he affirmed, received conflicting information about what he could do in a buffer zone. Police officers had already confirmed silent prayer was legal before local security officers stopped Adam for the same behaviour and fined him.

Considering the unequivocal misunderstanding, no one expected the district judge to decide the case was worth pursuing. And on top of that, Bournemouth Council has employed top barristers from his King’s Council, to fight their case in order to obtain a guilty verdict against Mr Smith-Connor for not paying a minor fine. It’s also worth remembering, that the lawyers from his King’s Council are not only very expensive but the legal fees incurred by the council will be paid by the British taxpayer while those of Mr Smith-Connor are at his own expense.

Another factor that goes against Mr Smith-Connor is the recent sacking of the Interior Minister, Suella Braverman. She had written a stiff letter to the Police Forces, ordering them not to arrest citizens for silent prayer. Without her support, silent prayer will become a criminal offence near every abortion facility in England and Wales once the Public Order Bill is enforced.

And here lies the crux of the matter. Mr Smith-Connor versus Bournemouth City Council comes at a critical moment for buffer zone legislation and it is this which distinguishes his case from the others. As was evident at the hearing yesterday, there is much more at stake than a unpaid penalty.

This was confirmed by Adam Smith-Connor when the *Daily Compass* spoke to him after the hearing yesterday. “My case has exposed the real reason I am being prosecuted. Buffer zones are not about protests but to stop pro-life charitable support to women who seek help and to stop prayer. If I win, buffer zones will collapse and they know it”, he said. “But, if I lose, thought crime will become embedded in law.”

ADAM SMITH-CONNOR TESTIMONY AT BUSSOLA DAY 2023