

UNITED KINGDOM

## Judgment time for Smith-Connor and anti-abortion prayer

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

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In two days, on Wednesday 16 October, the ruling on the historic case against Adam Smith-Connor, the war veteran accused of thoughtcrime, for praying silently near an abortion clinic, (read [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) will be revealed. The judge was due to hand

down her judgement on 11 October but requested and was granted another week for deliberation. The final decision, therefore, follows an extensive reflection lasting a month, three full days in court from 17 - 19 September and has cost Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCPC) £100,000 in legal fees (despite being bankrupt) to collect the standard £100 fine that Smith-Connor has refused to pay.

**The time and money spent on the case** is a clear indication of the importance of this trial which could have far reaching consequences on criminal law in the UK. If the Council wins, Smith-Connor's fine could increase from £100 to the maximum fine of £1000. But more importantly, it will seal the first conviction for thoughtcrime in Britain or in any democratic European country. And here lies the crux of the matter. A guilty judgement for Smith-Connor sets a precedent for future cases, definitively condemning and preventing, on the penalty of fines and potential prison sentences, any visible or invisible pro-life support including private prayers or thoughts on abortion within 150 metres of an abortion clinic in buffer zones. An important trophy for pro-abortion supporters to collect which would significantly consolidate their power and influence. While pro-life supporters are pushed into mapped out reserves where their existence is tolerated but rendered ineffective.

**The Smith-Connor case, therefore, is a show case** which for the Council and abortion supporters serves to 'punish one to teach a hundred' as the Chinese dictator Mao Zedong once said during the Cultural Revolution.

**It's also worth remembering** that Smith-Connor's case is not the first but the third high-profile case related to silent prayer in "buffer zones" in England. The first two fizzled out at the first hearing. In March 2022, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce and Father Sean Gough were both found not guilty of similar charges by Birmingham Magistrate's Court in a hearing that lasted minutes. And when Vaughan-Spruce despite being released of all charges was later arrested again in February 2023 for silent prayer, she sued the police for wrongful arrests, false imprisonments, assault and battery in relation to an intrusive body search and for a breach of her human rights violations. She was awarded a £13,000 settlement and an apology from Birmingham police in an out of court settlement.

**But in a total break from the legal procedure at Birmingham Magistrate's Court,** and despite Midland's police and the courts have made it clear that silent prayer is not a criminal act, the judge hearing Smith-Connor's case in Poole took it to trial. Three full days of court time to examine every minute detail of what happened in and outside Mr Smith-Connor's head on the two occasions he was questioned by police officers which

resulted in him being given a fixed statutory fine.

**The King's Council barristers (the most expensive in the United Kingdom)**

representing BCP Council were keen to oblige. They subjected Smith-Connor now married, father to two children and a chartered physiotherapist, to a tough grilling. Questions about where his hands were and what he was doing with them, the exact position of his head, how raised or lowered. If his eyes were gazing ahead, closed or looking down. "It seemed the slightest movement could determine a guilty or innocent verdict", Smith-Connor told the Daily Compass.

**Perhaps the most striking aspect of Smith-Connor's testimony** in court is the total transparency with which he planned his trips to the vicinity of Dean Park Clinic on Orphir Road in Bournemouth. On both occasions he averted the police days before to inform them of the date and time he would be there to pray silently for his deceased son. They replied by sending him a copy of the guidelines for buffer zones but he received no specific warning his visit would be illegal.

**On 17 November 2022, he arrived alone and took a discrete position** about 50 metres from the clinic, stood behind a tree, with his back to the facility, to avoid any impression of approaching or engaging with women using the facility. He began to pray silently for his son Jacob who he had paid to have aborted, which he bitterly regrets and whose death still haunts him. The local police arrived, and during the interaction, which **was captured on video**, he was asked the motive of his presence and was reassured he was doing nothing illegal and that he could stay and continue praying.

**A week later, on 24 November 2022**, when he returned to Orphir Road, BCP Council community safety accredited scheme officers were already waiting for him, having been alerted of the date and time of his arrival in writing by Smith-Connor. They waited approximately four minutes for him to take his usual position and engage in silent prayer before asking him, "what is the nature of your prayer"? This interaction **was also captured on video**. This was the occasion he was given the £100 statutory fine fixed by law. The notice detailed that he admitted he had been "praying for his deceased son" in a buffer zone. Smith-Connor explained that only seven days ago the police had told him silent prayer was not illegal and therefore he did not agree he should have to leave. His refusal to leave and subsequent failure to pay the fine led to a charge with the criminal offence of failing to comply with a public spaces protection order under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Smith-Connor entered a no guilty plea to the offence in court.

**A censure zone is an area in which local authorities** have banned any forms of protesting in relation to abortion issues which includes various expressions of pro-life or Christian belief such as offering help to women in crisis pregnancies, consensual conversations, or prayer.

**But, Smith-Connor's defence team,** the Christian charity Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) UK, contends that thought cannot amount to a crime and authorities must not criminalise citizens for the opinions or beliefs they hold in their minds on any given public street.