

Gay Police Association - Faith-Based Homophobia Article

On the 29th of June 2006, the Gay Police Association (GPA) placed an advertisement in the diversity supplement of the The Independent newspaper. This was a special edition supplement intended to coincide with the Euro-Pride celebrations in London that weekend.

The GPA National Executive Committee took the decision to publish a hard-hitting and challenging advertisement that would cause people of faith as well as non-faith to pause and consider justifications that have been used by some, to attack – psychologically, verbally and in some cases physically – the gay community for many years.

The advertisement describes the 74% increase in homophobic hate incidents recorded by the GPA, where the sole or primary motivating factor was the religious belief of the perpetrator. Between April 2005 and March 2006 the GPA handled almost 250 related enquiries, requests for assistance and allegations from police colleagues suffering discrimination in the workplace. A significant proportion of incidents also originated from members of the public, who contacted the GPA for advice and support.

The advertisement, which featured the Bible, was expanded in the accompanying text to encompass religions that institutionally condemn 'homosexuality' and that have provided some of their adherents with the justification to engage in homophobic behaviour.

The intention of the advertisement was to cause public debate about an issue that has remained taboo for centuries. An issue that is now having a serious and detrimental effect on the lives of hundreds of law-abiding gay men and women each year and which, on the basis of our records, is growing at such an alarming rate that it could soon become a serious social problem.

Whilst we accept that such behaviour is not condoned by all sections of all faith groups, neither is it as vehemently denounced as it could and should be. Suspicion exists that there is a lingering distaste for the concept of 'homosexuality', indelibly set in the minds of some religious followers. The British value system naturally perpetuates this position as it is steeped in centuries of religious influence.

It has never been the intention of the GPA to castigate and describe ALL followers of religion as homophobic. Indeed, it is an accepted fact that within the Anglican Church, different opinions on the issue of sexual orientation, as interpreted from the Bible, have caused schism and sadness for Christians on both sides of the debate.

Islam is also beginning to have to come to terms with differing interpretations of the Quran and in an increasingly secular society, such as in this country, those who justify homophobic actions and utterances, can and must expect to be challenged.

The GPA defends the right of every individual to have faith or to have no faith. However, we do not believe that this right should naturally extend to the point where such belief systems compromise the rights and freedoms of the gay community. There can be no justification for this under any circumstances.

The GPA agrees with the freedom to express opinion. However, when such opinion is hateful and causes denigration and suffering, people expressing such views should expect to be challenged by those similarly exercising their freedom of speech and acting in defence of their human rights.

With rights come responsibilities and those who exercise rights must do so within the confines of democratic secular law.

Increasingly the GPA is seeing instances of workplace homophobia where some colleagues of faith have used religious argument to pillory, demean and marginalise their gay colleagues. Apart from sending out deeply worrying signals as to their suitability to work within the police service, they do untold damage to their own religions.

The sending of unsolicited emails, sundry correspondence and the public display of blatant comprehensive condemnation of everything about a gay person, their existence, their contribution to society and their right to dignity and equal treatment if done in the name of religion is totally repugnant and unacceptable. It undermines the undeniable benefits religion has for many people, embarrasses those of faith who do not share such views and fractures society.

In recent years and months, the gay community has experienced an onslaught of vociferous, homophobically motivated campaigns from religious extremists, frantic in their desire to prevent gay people enjoying the same legal rights, freedoms and protections they take for granted. Perversely these groups used their religious belief as justification in securing discriminatory exemptions within equalities legislation such as the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the impending Equalities, Provision of Goods & Services Bill. They also campaigned actively against an equal age of consent, lifting the ban on gay people serving in the armed services and more recently the introduction of The Civil Partnership Act 2004.

The flagging, yet residual influence of certain faith groups cannot be underestimated. Their determination to deprive gay men and women of equality has to be recognised as divisive and damaging to the cohesiveness of society, of which gay people are an integral part.

It was perfectly acceptable for the police service to contribute to the debate and formation of racially and religiously aggravated offences.

The GPA advertisement is a similar contribution to the equalities agenda and in particular the existence of hierarchies in diversity. All people, irrespective of their religious persuasions, have to face the unattractive fact that certain homophobic faith justification can have a devastating effect on the lives of victims.

Those who are antagonistic towards the advantages of a diverse society held together by the best tenets of multi-faithism, and who roundly condemn difference, show little respect for the important sub-texts which extol understanding, love and acceptance and the eradication of hate.

Challenging inequality is as important as promoting equality. It is not possible to achieve success in one whilst ignoring the other. The GPA will continue to achieve both in equal measure and looks forward to working with those individuals and organisations that have a genuine desire to eradicate homophobia in all its guises.

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