

Pastor Arrested for Preaching John 3:16, Is Christianity Now Illegal?

In a move that seems more fitting for a dystopian novel than a democratic society, a 76-year-old retired Baptist pastor in Northern Ireland has been charged under the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act for delivering an open-air sermon based on John 3:16.

As reported by The Christian Post, pastor Clive Johnston, a former president of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland, now faces allegations of attempting to “influence” individuals accessing abortion services and of failing to leave the area when instructed by police.

His supposed transgression? Sharing a message of God’s love without any mention of abortion. ☐

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The incident occurred on July 7, 2024, near Causeway Hospital in Coleraine, where Pastor Johnston preached to a small gathering of about a dozen people. The group sang hymns and displayed a wooden cross, but notably lacked any placards or references to abortion.

Despite this, authorities deemed the service a violation of the buffer zone regulations. Simon Calvert, Deputy Director of The Christian Institute, aptly described the prosecution as “an outrageous restriction on freedom of religion and freedom of speech.”

And this isn’t an isolated incident.

In Scotland, the introduction of 200-meter buffer zones around

abortion clinics has led to alarming interpretations of the law. United States Vice President JD Vance recently highlighted concerns that such laws could criminalize individuals for praying in their own homes if visible from the street.

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Initially dismissed as misinformation, Scottish Green MSP Gillian Mackay, who introduced the buffer zone bill, later conceded that “performative” prayer inside one’s home could indeed be illegal, depending on who is passing by the window.

The implications are chilling. When a government begins to dictate where and how individuals can express their faith, even within the confines of their own homes, it signals a disturbing shift away from foundational freedoms. The arrest of a 74-year-old grandmother in Glasgow for holding a sign that read, “Coercion is a crime, here to talk, if you want,” further exemplifies this overreach. Her peaceful offer of conversation was met with handcuffs and charges under the new buffer zone law.

These developments should serve as a wake-up call.

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As governments increasingly sideline religious freedoms in favor of secular ideologies, the persecution of Christians in the West becomes not just a possibility but a mounting reality. If preaching the Gospel in public spaces can be banned, where does it end? As Calvert rightly questioned, “If the Gospel can be banned in this public place, where else can it be banned?” □

It’s imperative that we recognize and challenge these encroachments on our freedoms. Today, it’s a pastor and a

grandmother; tomorrow, it could be anyone and everyone. The time to stand for our rights and uphold the principles of free speech and religious expression is now, before they are eroded beyond repair.

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