

Wait, What? Secularists Side With Christian Street Preacher in Arrest Case

The National Secular Society (NSS) has spoken out in support of a Christian street preacher who received compensation from police after he was held for 19 hours for quoting the Bible.

Terry Sanderson, president of the NSS, says street preachers should be able to “make whatever point they want,” unless they are provoking “violence or mayhem.”

Greater Manchester Police had accused 57-year-old John Craven of public-order offenses after two teenage boys approached him in September 2011 and asked what he thought of homosexuals.

Craven responded by quoting the Bible’s stance on homosexuality, but said that “whilst God hates sin, He loves the sinner.”

He was then arrested for a public-order offense, after the teenagers told an officer they felt insulted by Craven’s comments.

Craven was not offered food or water for several hours, and he said his request for medication for his rheumatoid arthritis was ignored.

Sanderson says, “Free speech belongs to everybody, even those you disagree with, and so we support the right of street preachers to quote the Bible without having their collars felt.

“So long as they stay within the law, don’t incite violence or mayhem, they should be able to make whatever point they want, and their opponents should be able to respond without causing a disturbance or calling the police.

“Being insulted is not a good enough reason to have someone thrown into a police cell.”

Craven received £13,000 (about \$21,600) in compensation from Greater Manchester Police for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and breach of his human rights.

The total cost for the police, including both parties’ legal bills, will be over £50,000 (about \$83,200). The settlement came a few days before the case was due in court.

Craven was arrested for an offense under section 4A of the Public Order Act 1986 which criminalizes the use of insulting words with the intention of causing harassment, alarm or distress.

Recently the Christian Institute, the National Secular Society and others successfully campaigned to protect free speech by reforming Section 5 of the Public Order Act, which had criminalized “insulting” words or behavior without any intention to cause harassment, alarm or distress.

The College of Policing has since issued new guidance, telling officers they are not allowed to arrest people simply because others find their words or behavior insulting.