

Why 1 Denomination Is Up in Arms About 'The Lord's Prayer' Ad

Movie theaters in Britain—a nation that has practiced Christianity for more than 1,800 years—won't show a one-minute advertisement in which students, weightlifters and a police officer each recite a line from the Lord's Prayer.

"The Lord's Prayer is prayed by billions of people across the globe every day and in this country has been part of everyday life for centuries," a statement from the Rev. Arun Arora, director of communications for the Church of England, said. "Prayer permeates every aspect of our culture from pop songs and requiems to daily assemblies and national commemorations. For millions of people in the United Kingdom, prayer is a constant part of their lives whether as part thanksgiving and praise, or as a companion through their darkest hours."

The video, which opens with footage of the Most Reverend and Right Honorable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, continues with people from different walks of life reciting the prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13, which Christians believe was the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, hence the name the "Lord's Prayer."

The Church of England is sponsoring a prayer campaign called , which seeks to boost awareness of, and participation in prayer.

That seemingly innocuous goal wasn't satisfactory for the Digital Cinema Media (DCM) agency, which as "the market leader in U.K. cinema advertising, providing some 2,929 screens at 455 sites for advertisers. DCM sells 80 (percent) of the cinema advertising market through exhibitors including Cineworld, ODEON, Picturehouse, Vue and many independent

cinemas.”

In a statement provided to the BBC, Digital Cinema Media said “some advertisements—unintentionally or otherwise—could cause offence to those of differing political persuasions, as well as to those of differing faiths and indeed of no faith,” and therefore would ban the advertisement from cinemas.

The same BBC report quoted the Church of England’s chief legal adviser, Stephen Slack, as saying the ban could “give rise to the possibility of legal proceedings” under Britain’s Equality Act, a 2010 measure passed by Parliament outlawing discrimination by commercial businesses on the basis of religion.

The controversy generated over the advertisement has doubtless drawn thousands, if not millions, of viewers given the global media coverage. And Rev. Arora said he would want people to view the spot and judge for themselves.

Arora’s view has some support from Britain’s most noted atheist, Richard Dawkins, who told Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper that even if the cinemas have a right to a commercial decision about which advertising to accept, an exception should be made in this case. “I still strongly object to suppressing the ads on the grounds that they might ‘offend’ people. If anybody is ‘offended’ by something so trivial as a prayer, they deserve to be offended,” Dawkins said.