



Catholic Civil Rights League

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Monthly highlights

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League supports sportscaster in h.r. claim

The League June 23 expressed its support for Damian Goddard, the sports anchor fired by Rogers Sportsnet last month shortly after he tweeted his support for the traditional definition of marriage, as he commences his filing with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The filing will cite discrimination based on religious belief. Mr. Goddard is Catholic.

“Mr. Goddard’s case typifies a theme we hear all too often in other, lower-profile cases of workplace discrimination against people who do not support same sex marriage on religious grounds,” said Joanne McGarry, League executive director. “We hope Damian’s case will establish that freedom of religion and conscience, protected by the Civil Marriage Act of 2005, are meant to be given a robust interpretation.”

Mr. Goddard, the former host of “Connected,” posted some comments on his Twitter account to express his support of Burlington hockey agent Todd Reynolds, who created some controversy when he criticized New York Rangers player Sean Avery for appearing in a TV ad in support of same sex marriage.

Rogers Sportsnet distanced itself from the comments on its own Twitter account, and then announced that Mr. Goddard had been fired without specifying the reasons. A later statement denied the tweet was an issue, saying he was “a freelance contractor and in recent weeks it had become clear that he is not the right fit for our organization.”

The pertinent section of the 2005 Civil Marriage Act is as follows:

Freedom of conscience and religion and expression of beliefs

3.1 For greater certainty, no person or organization shall be deprived of any benefit, or be subject to any obligation or sanction, under any law of the Parliament of Canada solely by reason of their exercise, in respect of marriage between persons of the same sex, of the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the expression of their beliefs in respect of marriage as the union of a man and woman to the exclusion of all others based on that guaranteed freedom.

The League has always believed it is possible to accommodate religious and conscientious freedom in such a way that those seeking legally available services can secure them without forcing the participation of those who have religious and conscientious objections. Even some of the pro-same sex marriage organizations that appeared at the parliamentary hearings on the subject stated that religious and conscientious objection could be accommodated in the implementation of new legislation.

League granted leave to intervene in Whatcott appeal

OTTAWA, June 14, 2011 - The Catholic Civil Rights League has been granted leave to intervene in the Supreme Court of Canada appeal between the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and William Whatcott, who has faced numerous human rights filings in Saskatchewan because of his public leafletting and picketing on various homosexual rights questions.

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Hearings begin in prostitution appeal

Hearings began Monday June 13 in the Ontario Court of Appeal in the case of Bedford et al vs. the Attorneys-General of Ontario and Canada. The challenge, which was successful in Ontario Superior Court, would remove three distinct prohibitions against prostitution. The League is an intervener in the appeal, in coalition with REAL Women of Canada and Christian Legal Fellowship.

We presented our intervention June 16, ably represented by Ranjan Agrawal of Bennett Jones Law Firm. In keeping with our factum, Mr. Agrawal zeroed in firmly on the moral issues raised by the case, and how Canadians' moral disapproval of prostitution is very widely held, not just the view of the very religious. "If you asked any number of people whether they want their children involved in the sex trade, you would get a unanimous answer – no." Because many lawyers and some of the judges had implied that prostitutes' inability to take safety measures was a danger not facing any other occupation, Mr. Agrawal reminded the court that the status of prostitution is unique, and that the gap created by its being legal but difficult to practice openly was deliberate, and meant to deter people from entering into the work, not a gap meant to be filled.

"Prostitution is an affront to the dignity of women and men, carries inherent dangers to those who participate in it, and also creates problems for those living in neighbourhoods where prostitution is common," said Joanne McGarry, League executive director. "We believe the current prohibitions reflect the moral beliefs of the majority of Canadians. Moreover, the decision to strike out these provisions based upon the perception of a greater risk to those who engage in such activities ignores the reality that the dangers inherent in prostitution are impossible to control completely." The appeal court reserved its decision.

BC schools must accommodate parents' requests, says League

Parents of public school students can arrange for the exemption of their children from classes or exercises that are offensive to their moral or religious convictions across the curriculum. That message was delivered to all school boards in the province earlier this month by the Catholic Civil Rights League.

The letters state that, despite the Corren Agreement and official Ministry of Education policy, "school districts have a duty to accommodate objecting families to the point of undue hardship, by such means as student exemptions and

alternative delivery of curriculum if need be."

Sean Murphy, a director of the League, says that the real policy of the Ministry is that accommodation by alternative delivery is possible in all subjects. This is revealed in internal e-mails and letters obtained through access to information requests. An article on the League's website backs up the assertions with links to key documents. He also points to Burnaby School District 41, which formally offers alternative delivery of science curriculum for those with cultural, religious, or ethical objections to animal dissection.

"The Ministry has not quashed the Burnaby policy, said Mr. Murphy, "and it won't, because the Ministry's real policy is that school districts are free to arrange for such accommodation."

Advertising council upholds League complaint

The League was recently advised that the Advertising Council of Canada (ASC) has upheld, on appeal, the League's complaint about some outdoor advertising by Virgin Radio earlier this year in the Toronto area. The campaign included a series of billboards directed at the young, some featuring female pop stars such as Britney Spears and Katie Perry, and a second series with Usher that included the phrases "OMG" and "OMFG". ("OMG" is a social media acronym for "Oh, my God", while "OMFG" adds an obscenity.) On the Usher billboards council agreed that the effect of the billboards was in violation of the ASC's Code 14d, which states that portrayals must not "undermine human dignity; or display obvious indifference to, or encourage, gratuitously and without merit, conduct or attitudes that offend the standards of public decency prevailing among a significant segment of the population."

The advertiser appealed, claiming among other things that the ad was directed at a youth demographic which would not find it offensive. In our reply, we pointed out that a billboard allows no targeting and confronts people whether they want to see it or not. "The fact that words, acronyms and images might be acceptable on a hand-held device or a web page does not make them acceptable on a medium that the consumer cannot turn off, close or choose not to attend."

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