

USING MEDIA INFLUENCE FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Pastor Green in Sweden preached a sermon on sexuality and the Bible in July 2003. He was sentenced to one month in prison in June 2004 for expressing contempt against homosexuals. His case eventually went to the Supreme Court, where he was acquitted on November 9, 2005.

Laws and the Court Case

The prosecutor assumed that “homosexuals may have been offended” by the sermon, had they heard it. There was no instigation to violence in the sermon, and no witnesses were ever brought in to testify about harm as a result of Green’s sermon. The emphasis was placed on potential hearers and how they subjectively may have perceived it.

Green’s acquittal in the Swedish Supreme Court made reference to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) where it says that individuals have the right to express views that may be found offensive by others – individuals, groups, or even the state. According to Swedish law (criminal code 16:8), Pastor Green was guilty. However, the ECHR is incorporated into Swedish law, and took precedence.

The Importance of the Case

The issue was freedom of speech, and not a particular theological conviction. Free speech is fundamental to other freedoms. Without it we have no freedom of press and religion, nor political freedom or freedom to express ourselves in art and music. As laws become increasingly internationalized, it is clear that the Green case has global ramifications.

A Worrying Trend

The law, the court case and the public debates illustrate the shift from freedom of speech to “freedom from hearing”; from the speaker to the hearer; from what was said to how it was perceived; from instigating violence to “I was offended”; from objective (what was expressed) to subjective criteria and laws (how was it received, perceived). This trend can be observed in many countries.

The Strategy

We worked on four interconnected levels: journalists, legislators, lawyers and prayer partners. A global campaign was launched with a focus on Swedish media and public opinion; to working with Swedish MPs as well as supporting Green’s lawyer with several amicus briefs from around the world, especially through the Advocates International network. People on all continents were mobilized to pray.

Lessons Learned

1. Identify the *core issue*; in this case freedom of speech.
2. Understand the *process*: media shapes public opinion, which in turn affects politicians who legislate and lawyers who have to work with these laws. Prayers for justice, for human dignity, for human rights and freedoms - for all - make a difference.
3. Develop and utilize national, regional and international *networks and strategic alliances* of journalists, politicians and lawyers as well as prayer partners.
4. By *working together* across disciplines and national borders, we saw a shift in public opinion and media. Several influential leaders in Sweden were educated to see the issue at hand and they changed from “anti-Green” to pro-free speech.
5. Through these international networks we were able to bring tangible and *professional support and input*, through letters, meetings, phone calls, articles and amicus briefs, to journalists, MPs and lawyers.

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