

More religious censorship from advertising watchdog

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The Advertising Standards Authority is once again acting as blasphemy-finder-in-chief as it bans yet another advertisement that it has decided is "likely to cause serious offence" – this time to Sikhs.

The advert for a furniture shop has been banned for supposedly distorting religious verses.

The television ad for Birmingham's The Sofa Factory showed an image of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, and featured a song in the style of the sacred Sikh verses, but with the lyrics, in Punjabi: "True name of God is You are wondrous; come to The Sofa Factory in Birmingham; measure and make your corner sofas; reupholster your older sofas."

The lyrics continue: "My father Sarvan Singh sowed the seeds of this business; I come from the village Kooner Dhanni; come on dad; I get plenty of your love and good wishes, plenty of love; you are my guru, my true guru. Sofa Factory."

Just one viewer complained that the ad's use of Guru Nanak and the Gurmantar is offensive.

The Sofa Factory did not respond to the Advertising Standards Authority's (ASA) enquiries about the ad.

Upholding the complaint, the ASA said: "We considered that the use of the central icon of the Sikh faith and the use and distortion of religious verses to advertise products made light of those important elements of the Sikh faith in a way that was likely to cause serious offence to some members of the Sikh community."

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said: "The Advertising Standards Authority's attitude to religion is becoming more like an inquisition every day. You can hardly mention anything to do with religion without somebody complaining – and now it seems only one person has to whinge in order to successfully censor advertising. Who needs a blasphemy law when you've got the ASA to enforce your religious privileges? The Complaints Committee will be donning scarlet robes soon."

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