



general gayety

by leslie robinson
qnotes contributor

Kiss and sell

Diplomacy suddenly got a whole lot friendlier. Leaders of nations and leaders of faiths, instead of shaking hands, are kissing each other on the lips.

Global warming, indeed.

All this intimacy is courtesy of Benetton, the Italian clothing company, whose new ad campaign features unlikely duos smooching.

In one image, President Obama kisses Chinese leader Hu Jintao. In another, Obama bussees Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Needless to say, the pictures are fakes. So, it's no use wondering whether Obama considered the Chinese or the Venezuelan a better kisser.

The photos were expertly doctored. The men have their eyes closed, their lips meet meaningfully and noses stay out of the way.

Above their heads is the word — if it is a word — “Unhate.” Clearly by pairing the leaders of countries that have tense relations, the ad sends a message about world peace.

Clearly by pairing heterosexual men, the ad sends a message that at Benetton they know, when it comes to shock value, it's hard to beat a gay twist. This is their variation on “Gay is Good.”

During past ad campaigns, Benetton earned a reputation for shocking. Previous images included parents grieving over a man dying of AIDS, a priest and a nun kissing and a black woman-breastfeeding a white baby.

In recent years, various Obama-haters have depicted him as a Muslim, a chimpanzee, a zombie and the devil. That was to sell a philosophy, not Christmas bras.

It's unknown whether this queer depiction irritates Obama any more than the others did; the White House expressed displeasure on a different score. Deputy press secretary Eric Schultz said in a statement, “The White House has a long-standing policy disapproving of the use of the president's name and likeness for commercial purposes.”

Presidents who died long ago, however, are available to sell cars in February.

Obama, Hu and Chavez aren't the only ones to get the Benetton treatment. In a momentary display of heterosexuality, French President Nicolas Sarkozy kisses German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu plants one on Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

In the image that has created the biggest uproar so far, Pope Benedict XVI locks lips with Egyptian imam Mohammed Ahmed al-Tayeb. The two haven't been on the best of terms all year, but to see this “Unhate” ad is to assume one of them said, “Let's kiss and make up.”

The Guardian reported that after posters of this image went up around Italy, the Vatican responded unusually quickly, condemning

such provocative advertising and promising legal action to stop the use of a photo “in which the Holy Father appears in a way considered to be harmful, not only to the dignity of the pope and the Catholic church, but also to the sensibility of believers.”

Who don't want to see their pit bull of homophobia kissing another fella.

Benetton immediately withdrew the image from everywhere. “We reiterate that the meaning of this campaign is exclusively to combat the culture of hatred in all its forms,” said the company. “We are therefore sorry that the use of the image of the pope and the imam has so offended the sentiments of the faithful.”

Naturally they're sorry. So, so sorry. So, so, so, terribly down-to-their-socks sorry. It never occurred to them that giant posters of the pope smooching a man might offend their fellow Italian Catholics. They're surprised that the Vatican raised a stink. It never dawned on them that the uproar would generate free worldwide publicity.

And, Julius Caesar founded Versace and Sophia Loren is in line to be the next pope. . :

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guest commentary

by Rob Schofield

An amendment of many names

One of the big challenges for caring and thoughtful North Carolinians in light of the General Assembly's decision to place a constitutional amendment on next May's primary ballot that purports to “define marriage” is: What in the heck should the proposal be called?

Especially in light of the powerful messages that can be conveyed in just a few words, “naming rights” are likely to be extremely important in shaping the amendment's reception by voters. How can one convey the extent of the havoc the amendment would wreak in a pithy phrase or moniker? Should advocates get specific or keep it generic?

One thing is for sure: Don't call it “the marriage amendment.” This is an easy one to slip into, but it definitely falls short — both in terms of accuracy and effectiveness. First of all, the proposed amendment does much, much more than impact marriage. Indeed, as constitutional scholars have noted, the proposed amendment would be one of the most far reaching in the nation.

By saying that a heterosexual marriage is the “only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State,” the proposal

goes well beyond marriage and would create all sorts of problems in other areas — many of which seem likely to trouble even the opponents of same-sex “marriage.”

The amendment could jeopardize current state domestic violence protections for unmarried couples and child custody rights of domestic partners (even if they are heterosexual). The amendment would also pretty clearly prevent the state from adopting other protections for unmarried couples in the future that fall well short of marriage, including: the right to family hospital visitation privileges, the right to make medical decisions if a partner is incapacitated, the right for domestic partners to make funeral and burial arrangements for one another, the right to inherit when a partner dies without a will, and the right to be named guardian or conservator if one partner becomes incapacitated.

Here are some names for the amendment that would be accurate:

The marriage discrimination amendment — This one's pretty obvious. By permanently limiting the definition of marriage in North Carolina, the amendment singles out a seg-

ment of the population and etches in stone its second-class status.

The anti-marriage amendment — In a strange bit of twisted logic, proponents of the amendment attempt to argue that forever limiting marriage to different sex couples is necessary in order to “protect” marriage from becoming “devalued” and to prevent those couples from becoming less interested in staying in marriages. But this argument flies in the face of the facts.

Research in three states that permit same-sex marriage or civil unions (Washington, Connecticut and Massachusetts) shows that the overall marriage rate has either stayed flat or increased. Meanwhile, the divorce rate in these states has either declined or stayed flat. Conversely, in Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia (states with amendments) marriage and divorce rates have experienced negative trends since passage.

The anti-family amendment — Proponents also attempt to argue that heterosexual marriage is necessary for optimal child rearing results. But dozens of peer-reviewed scientific studies have been able to detect no disadvantage for children raised in same sex couples in such areas as mental health, social adjustment, school performance, and behavioral problems.

The anti-economic competitiveness amendment — There is also compelling

evidence to support the common sense conclusion that adoption of a constitutional amendment would send precisely the wrong message to the creative classes (i.e., the smart and innovative people who create jobs and economic growth in the 21st Century) at a time in the world in which their presence is desperately needed. That some North Carolinians would want to exclude such people and dissuade them from staying and/or relocating to their state in these economic hard times is beyond amazing.

No one knows at this point, of course, which name will end up as the name that the media and the public will latch onto in the weeks and months ahead. Given the general resistance to using “loaded” language in the mainstream news media, it may well be that opponents would simply do well to focus on the use of more generic terms like the **marriage limitation amendment** or **amendment one**.

Whichever label ends up rising to the top, however, let's hope all North Carolinians concerned about promoting freedom and equality and saying “no” to exclusion and discrimination get right to work helping their fellow citizens understand the truth that lies behind it. . :

— Rob Schofield is the Director of Research and Policy Development at N.C. Policy Watch, ncpolicywatch.com.

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