

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

**HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL**

**SUBMISSION FROM MR KEVIN BINNIE**

Dear Sirs,

I wish to express my serious concern to the proposed Hate Crime Bill and its potential impact to destroy freedom of speech in our country particularly when it comes to the expression of the Christian faith. In particular I am alarmed by the plan to introduce a new offence of “stirring up of hatred” especially when the Bill does not include anywhere near adequate protection of free speech for matters of religion. I refer to Lord Bracadale’s independent review which stressed the need for a clear distinction between the legitimate debate and rabble rousing – the Bill abjectly fails to reflect this. There is a serious risk here that politically-motivated opponents of Christianity will label disagreement as hatred and use it as a tool to silence Christians. This cannot be a positive step forward for our country.

If passed, this Bill could fundamentally change our society for the worse. For example, a stirring up hatred offence could be committed in a private conversation in one’s own home, let alone thinking of the impact for church services! As a Christian, it is imperative that we maintain the freedom in this country to preach and share the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be able to express the principles of the Bible.

Offences of stirring up hatred threaten freedom of religion and belief. This may stop people giving an account of what they believe and turn our country into an Orwellian nightmare of a “thought police” state! My understanding is that existing criminal law makes provision for dealing with threatening or abusive behaviour likely to cause fear or alarm and therefore no new law is required. However, if this law is to be passed it must be amended to ensure: Church services are excluded; free speech on religion is strengthened to protect more than mere discussion or criticism; stirring up hatred offences should only cover threatening conduct and conduct that is intended to stir up hatred.

Thank you for this consultation and the call for views on the proposed Hate Crime Bill. I trust you will take my view, and the views of many other Christians who share the same concerns, seriously to ensure our freedom to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ is preserved.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Kevin Binnie  
20 July 2020