

## **JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

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

#### **SUBMISSION FROM JAMES AND FRANCES HODGKINSON**

We are responding to the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee's request for views on the Hate Crime and Public Disorder (Scotland) Bill, soon to be considered by the committee prior to the formulation of relevant legislation to be put forward to the Scottish Parliament with a view to subsequent enactment.

The most concerning part of the Bill is the creation of new "stirring up hatred" offences. As we understand it, the existing law covers race, but extending it to cover religion, sexual orientation and transgender identity would have profound consequences for free speech and religious liberty. These new offences could have a significant impact on our freedom as born again, bible believing Christians to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation or to call on people to repent of sin - even in church.

We understand that, as it is currently drafted, the Bill does not include key legal safeguards contained in parallel legislation in England and Wales. Conduct need not be threatening or intended to stir up hatred for an offence to be committed, because the Bill seems to imply that any expression of religious or moral convictions can be considered as "abusive" and therefore likely to "stir up hatred". This means that an offence could conceivably be committed unwittingly where there is absolutely no intention to stir up hatred and possibly even in the privacy of one's own home!

As true Christians we would never support genuinely threatening or abusive behaviour, but many of those who oppose biblical truth would claim that any form of disagreement with their own views constitutes "hatred". These proposed "stirring up hatred" offences could provide them with a new tool to try to close down debate and silence Christians and thereby have a negative effect on the right of free speech in Scotland.

We would ask the committee members to take these views into account as they proceed to scrutinise the detail of this Bill.

James and Frances Hodgkinson  
20 July 2020