

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

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

**SUBMISSION FROM DR MATTHEW JACK**

Dear Committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to give my personal views on the above Bill. The very fact that I can comment on this is appreciated and yet there are elements in the Bill that if I were to disagree or express public opinion on, I may be in danger of a hate crime, such is the the insidious erosion of free speech and honest informed debate

I write this as a Christian and retired medical practitioner. In both of these areas of my life there have been challenges and these continue.

As a Christian I value the ability to share my faith and yet I feel that even to quote parts of the Bible may be seen as hateful to some. Debate on matters of faith and morality are not restricted to Christians and stretch back to antiquity, to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Debate is a rich part of our Judeo-Christian heritage, it is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures that God invites debate - Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord" In the New Testament St Paul debates with the philosophers in Athens - Acts 17.

It is important that matters of religion, ethics and morality can be feely discussed and debated in a mature society that should be able to differentiate differences of opinion from using a position to 'stir up hatred' - a phrase which itself needs to be explained. These offences should only cover conduct that is intended to stir up hatred.

I do concede that were are elements in the Christian faith that are exclusive, not least the exclusivity of the claims of Jesus. I wonder if we will still be able to sing Handel's Messiah in which in that great anthem, The Hallelujah chorus the words "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever" Rev 11:15. However until that day there does exist in our nation as Andrew Melville said "twa kingdoms" It is important that we in the church and those in parliament recognise this and learn from our history our respective roles.

The Independant Review of Hate Crime in Scotland By Lord Bracadale recommended a free speech clause, and that any legislation should make a distinction between 'rational argument' and 'rabble rousing'. Importantly he also accepted that the right to free speech 'protects expression which shocks, offends, and disturbs other people" If the bill does not do that then we can say goodbye to Billy Connolly and Ricki Fulton repeats on the TV.

Yours sincerely

Dr Matthew Jack

Dr Matthew Jack  
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