

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM STORNOWAY REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

- 1. Do you think there is a need for this Bill and, if so, why? Are there alternatives to this legislation that would be effective, such as non-legislative measures, wider reforms to police or criminal justice procedures? Are there other provisions you would have liked to have seen in the Bill or other improvements that should have been made to the law on hate crime?*

There is not a need for this bill. Existing criminal law is sufficient to deal with all threatening and abusive behaviour, and there is no need for new legislation. Legislation is not the answer to deal with hatred. The greatest need is the Gospel.

- 6. Do you have views on the merits of Part 2 of the Bill and the plans to introduce a new offence of stirring up of hatred?*

The proposed new offence of stirring up hatred would be a dangerous change to law. Existing criminal law is sufficient to deal with all threatening and abusive behaviour, and there is no need for new legislation. Under the proposed legislation, however, a Christian could be accused of stirring up hatred for speaking about matters of faith and morality or even reading aloud the Bible.

Christianity is a religion of love, but love is not just nebulous feeling – at times love disagrees and debates because it recognises that some topics are of great importance. There are little safeguard under the proposals for the protection of churches or ministers to preach what the Bible states. Will ministers be arrested for preaching that there is only one true religion and the others are false, and that all need the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour? This stance could be misconstrued as stirring up hatred against other religions. Or will a minister be arrested for teaching on the Biblical view of sexuality and marriage -even if popular opinion disagrees? Even if the minister speaks with love and respect, the proposals make it possible for it to be misconstrued as stirring up hatred. In fact, even where there is absolutely no intention to stir up hatred some who disagree with what the Bible states may argue that such ministers are stirring up hatred simply to silence debate. The Church's liberty to speak even unpopular opinions should be protected. Such a restriction on Christian speech is unacceptable.

But we also think of Christian businesses. Since the bill “creates offences of possessing inflammatory material with a view to communicating the material in circumstances where there is an intention to stir up hatred or it is likely that hatred would be stirred up,” the proposed legislation could be used to target Christian publishers, as particular books which teach Biblical truth could be censored if someone complains that they feel hated by the doctrines contained within, even if there are no threats or any abuse in the literature. Section 8 shows that such material could be seized and destroyed. This law could also target Christians who distribute tracts.

What if a Christian disagrees with transgenderism because the Bible clearly teaches that God made male and female? The new law could be used to compel us to speak in a particular way against our conscience and against our God, e.g. using preferred pronouns.

These proposed restrictions are the greatest attack on the Church's liberty to preach and speak Biblically since the days of the Covenanters. The law sounds good because it seeks to restrict hatred. Christians are at the forefront of rejecting hatred and pursuing peace and love. But while the proposal sounds good, it has a hinder barb that takes away legal protections to disagree and proclaim what needs to be heard.

Stornoway Reformed Presbyterian Church
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