

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM THE KINGS CHURCH

I represent the Leadership team of The Kings Church, a well-established Christian church of about 300 adults, youth and children which is very active in meeting needs in in the Motherwell area by running toddlers groups, feeding those in need with hot meals or through food parcels, and tackling issues of social isolation. Our primary aim, is of course, to advance the aim of the Christian faith, which we seek to do in a loving, compassionate and non-judgemental way.

We are naturally concerned that by creating new offences such as the “stirring up of hate,” the proposed “Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill” will potentially turn ordinary citizens of Scotland unknowingly into criminals. Such people would have no intent to “stir up hatred” but would instead be seeking to operate within the well-established existing culture of “free speech” and simply voice their sincere but, in some cases perhaps, less culturally popular opinion.

We understand that the legislation covering England & Wales which was passed at Westminster and supported by the votes of many of the SNP MPs, carries much wider safeguards such as requiring there to be an intent to stir up hatred with some robust free speech clauses included. This is particularly important as we believe that the vast majority of Scots want to live in a liberal society where there is freedom to express our views in an open and honest way without fear that someone, somewhere might want to say that they were being abusive when that was never the intention. We feel that this would represent the opinion of most Scots, of all faiths and none.

We also note with some concern that there is a plan within this legislation to abolish the offence of blasphemy. If there have been no prosecutions for 175 years surely this must mean that either the existing law has been an effective deterrent for such a crime, or more likely that there are such crimes but they are going unpunished. We are sad to read that the Scottish Government feel that this law no longer reflects the society in which we live. That may indeed be the case, however we feel that this Bill seeks to abolish a law against an explicit attempt to stir up hatred against God and replace it with a law that implies an attempt to stir up hatred against others when no such intent is present.

We thank you for taking the time to read our response to this call for views and we pray for God’s continued blessing on our country

The Kings Church  
24 July 2020