

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM GLENROTHES BAPTIST CHURCH

Dear Government Ministers,

I am writing to you on behalf of the members and adherents of Glenrothes Baptist Church in the Fife concerning the call for views on the proposed Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill. We are a long established congregation of diverse ages, backgrounds, and perspectives. We have over 200 faithful members and adherents in our congregation, and we minister to up to many hundreds of people in Glenrothes each week at our main premises in the Glenrothes Town Centre. Our ministries are multi-faceted and varied; we believe our views also represent an even larger number within Scotland of other like-minded churches and ministries similar to our own whom we have partnership with. However some of these Christians are afraid to speak up on this matter for fear of repercussions. We plead with you to vote down this bill as it stands. In its current form this bill is an attack on freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and religious liberty. Please re-draft this bill to ensure clear and unequivocal protections for freedom of speech and religious liberty for all peoples.

We want you to know that we thank God for you and we pray for you frequently as our government. As Christians, we believe you have not just been elected by humans, but have ultimately been instituted by God to uphold His justice and righteousness in this land— to be an instrument ‘sent by God to praise those who do right and punish those who do wrong’ (1 Peter 2:14). During this unprecedented time we also want to extend our thanks to you all of the ways you have sacrificially and generously led us as a nation over these past months of global pandemic. We are also thankful for the times in which we see God’s character in your legislation. Though we even sense your noble intentions in this proposed bill, we strongly oppose mainly because of the dangerous consequences it will unintentionally have on the freedom of our whole society.

Please don’t misunderstand— we believe that the desire of this government to protect any and all people from true hate and violence regardless of differences is noble. As Christians we applaud this and say ‘Amen’ as we stand upon the shoulders of our Christian forefathers and mothers who bought an end the slave trade and who worked to bring about true equity and welfare to the poor here. We believe that every single Human, regardless of any and all differences, has been created by and in the image of God; as such, we regard every life as precious and the intentional creation of almighty God. Every human has value and purpose regardless of any differences. Christians are foremost to be known by our love for all people- even our enemies! Yet contrary to popular sentiment, Christian love does not mean always agreeing with, condoning, vocally approving of everyone or everything a person does or thinks. Christians are also called to love people enough to speak the Truth of God’s Word on serious matters we may disagree about— and many may find the Christian worldview offensive and even some even claim it to be ‘hateful’ or ‘abusive’. Therefore all Christians (and indeed people of any religion or exclusive views) have serious cause for concern with this bill.

**Here are some of the specific concerns we have with the bill:**

1. At a very basic level, if the bill were to be voted through as it is, every person in Scotland would be forced to make sure that they never said anything that others could find or determine themselves to be “abusive” or “hateful”. Because the current proposed bill does not define “Hate Speech” or “Abuse” clearly and objectively in terms of *mens rea*, this proposed crime could even be committed without malicious intent.

The bill is not clear who makes the determination of what constitutes “Hate Speech” or “Abuse”— The police? the individual offended? The person who shouts the loudest? Unfortunately today like never before people are “offended” by everything. Mobs of people are quick to cry “abuse” or “hate speech” at anyone who insults their sensibilities even if no actual harm has been done. In our current climate of cancel culture, the normal modus operandi is to silence any dissenting voice and free speech by crying abuse or hate.

For this reason, similar legislation in England and Wales on the topic covers actual threatening conduct only as well as obvious and proven intent to stir up hatred. These are quantifiable and objective measures that the Scottish Government should consider adding into this bill.

If the bill passes as it stands, free speech will cease. Surely the primary mark of a free society is that we are free to disagree with one another on huge things even if that offends or makes others have hurt feelings. In the current form of the bill, subjective interpretations of offence will be misconstrued as hate speech. Our laws must be objective and quantifiable rather than subjectively interpreted.

2. The Christian Message is offensive. It always has been.

Christians believe exclusive things about GOD- The Bible says that Almighty God is the one true God who created all things and all peoples in His image and for His glory. We believe exclusively that He is the one and only true God and all other Gods and pursuits are vain idols. This is offensive and even considered blasphemy to other religions (and non-religions). Yet this is what the Bible teaches (and we must teach). We believe God is Holy and the just judge who must punish sin and whom everyone will stand before in judgment one day to give an account.

About HUMANITY- The Bible teaches that all human beings have been created as either male or female in the image of God. From the book of Genesis we see this clearly. Jesus Himself noted this as well when he said, “Have you not read that He who made them male and female...” (Matthew 19:4). Although the vast majority opinion in this country is in line with a traditional Christian understanding of gender and sex, this new bill would essentially make it illegal for Christians, and indeed

scientists to teach this or question the Transgender movement in any way.

About SIN & MORALITY- More offensively, however, Christians believe the Bible when it teaches that all humans have been created by God but we have sinned against God and are in judgment. (Romans 3:23) This is an offensive message to every person. The Bible teaches that all of us have broken God's holy laws through our disobedience in many ways regardless of our biological tendencies or hearts desires toward sin. We believe that every human being has rebelled against God and broken his laws by our wilful sin. We all sin differently when we live in a way that is opposed to what His Word the Bible says. And because of our sin, Christians believe that all humans are under God's eternal judgment of hellfire. (Romans 6:23)

About SEXUAL MORALITY- The Bible has a clear and unchanged sexual ethic as well. The Bible teaches that every human is prone to temptation toward sexual immorality as humans. The Bible condemns all sexual immorality including pornography, adultery, and fornication, and lust in all its forms apart from the sexual union of one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage— including indulging in any sexual behaviour that is contrary to this. This has always been the view of the church (and almost all religions) over the centuries and across the nations. We hold this view alongside millions of Christians worldwide. Yet we are still friends with, love and minister to, some who would identify as part of the LGBTQ community. We have a mutual respect for each other even if a complete disagreement with each other on this topic. We would not want to live in a society where their view was silenced or considered hateful. Neither would they wish to live in a society where our voice or ministries were silenced. However your current proposed bill would do just that— silence any who dissent to your view of morality.

About the WAY of SALVATION- Jesus Himself preached, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me".(John 14:6) "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus".(Acts 4:12) "God so loved the world that he gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life... whoever believes in the Son has life. Whoever does not believe in the son does not have life but the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:16, 23). These exclusive views of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone are seen as some as offensive and wrong. Those who disagree would even see them as arguably abusive and hateful. Yet that is what we believe as Christians have always believed. In fact— almost every religion in the world holds to an exclusive view of salvation. The Bible says in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and Believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead you will be saved". Yet your proposed Bill would make it a hate crime for us to preach and teach any exclusive view of salvation that rejects other religion and its ways of salvation. Oddly enough, in this way this bill in its current form show the absolute

intolerance of “tolerance”.

3. Taking all of this together, our main issues with this bill in its current form are that it will hinder our organisation (and all faith based organisations in this following ways):

a. It leaves no freedom to believe and preach a Biblical morality or sexual ethic;

b. It leaves no freedom to disagree with or question the LGBTQ movement;

c. It leaves no freedom to disagree with or question Transgenderism or vocalise a traditional view of gender;

d. It leaves no freedom to emphatically proclaim exclusivity of one faith whilst stating that other faiths are false.

Therefore this bill is an attack on free speech, freedom of conscience, and religious liberty. However, the Bible commands us as Christians to believe and teach these things. Therefore this bill will actually put all Christians in the difficult situation of having to choose whether they will obey God or the government. This is nothing short of religious persecution.

I seek to conclude with this plea to look to our Scottish history. I pen this letter from St. Andrews near the Martyrs monument. Erected in 1842, the stone structure commemorates Patrick Hamilton, Henry Forrester, George Wishart, Walter Mill, and others who, in support of the Protestant faith, suffered death by fire at St Andrews. In the 16th century these reformers publicly preached and taught exclusive things about Jesus that the popular culture and established religious elites determined were offensive, hateful, and wrong. Rather than allowing free speech, disagreement and robust debate and opposition, the martyr's message was deemed unlawful and silenced. It was seen by the populace and those in power at the time as 'offensive' 'hateful' and 'abusive' toward those who held opposing views. For their crimes, these men were deemed heretics. To the cheers of angry mobs were burnt alive. Five centuries later, we are at a crossroads in this same land. Many Christians fear that once more our nation seems to be heading toward a totalitarian culture which does not allow opposition, freedom of speech or dissent. Many are fearful to speak up concerning their strongly held religious beliefs for fear public castigation or (if this bill becomes law) even potential time in jail. Many see this bill as a slippery slope toward repeating our past. Please re-consider. Please, for freedom's sake, vote down this bill.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Jacob Brothers  
Lead Pastor  
Glenrothes Baptist Church

25 July 2020