

Justice Committee

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Robert Anderson

I would like to submit the following with reference to the above proposed Bill.

As a committed Christian I am absolutely against sectarianism in any form, indeed if any of those who claim to be “following their religion” to justify their behaviour, were to actually stop and consider what their religion teaches, they would not do as they do.

I am concerned however about this Bill. I firmly believe that it should include some sort of “Freedom of Speech” clause. My reason for this is that, if not, this Bill will be misused against those who would preach in the open air, and indeed in churches.

I am concerned that when preaching from God’s word, there will be those that will claim that what is being said is “sectarian” and that the police will not be able to decide whether or not it is and prosecute anyway. This will happen because of the political capital associated with bring such crimes before the courts.

There have been instances south of the border, where street preachers have been putting across Biblical views on homosexuality, only for the police to arrest them for inciting homophobia and saying things which are offensive.

The same sort of instances WILL happen if this Bill is not narrower in its definitions and if there is no “Freedom of Speech” clause included.

I am not for one moment suggesting that Christian preachers will incite, or encourage sectarianism in any way shape or form. Neither will they condone sectarianism, but, someone, somewhere will try and misrepresent, or misinterpret, for their own purposes what a preacher is saying. The new Bill must guard against that, and it must guarantee freedom of speech.

It is not only in preaching that I have concerns. If during a conversation with someone, I explain where I think that another denomination errs from what the Bible teaches, this can be misconstrued, and claims of me being an offender under sectarian laws, can and will occur.

So it is absolutely imperative that a clause is included to guard against this.

Can I suggest that contact is made with an organisation called The Christian Institute with regards to this?

Robert Anderson
24 August 2011