

I write to express my strongest concerns (read unbelief) at the proposed "Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012."

With a population of 7 billion people on the earth, there are probably just as many opinions. What causes offence to one is perfectly reasonable to another. Whilst we must have standards, I believe that it is virtually impossible to legislate bad behaviour out. Using Corporal Punishment earlier as a deterrent did not deter the serious criminal element – according to many statistics being quoted in reports. So too with the alcohol prohibition.

There are already mechanism to deliver good behaviour and minimise the bad. By focusing on issues of common courtesy and acting with integrity within a moral system, the objective would be achieved – but they must be taught at home and at school from an early age. Once we release our children into a post-school environment, it is far too late to introduce them to a new world with legislative do's and don'ts; their character has already been formed.

A most serious concern I have is that the proposed Bill violates many principles of Natural Justice. What happened to the right to be heard and the right to have representation? Where does the Western fundamental ethos of "presumption of innocence" stand in this proposal (clause 124)?

The right for religious freedom must continue to be available to all – even someone declaring "no religion" is a religious expression. Are they too going to be singled out? Why is it for arguments sake that anyone challenging the status of the divinity of Jesus receives no recrimination, and yet anyone questioning the status of the prophet Mohamed commits an almost "hanging offence." Where does this nonsensical pursuit of sanitisation end. Freedom of speech is essential and we must value it and protect it rather than strangle it by laws and laziness. It will require far more work to model and teach good behaviour and "we" all will have to take responsibility for it, rather than a faceless few who legislate.

I draw your attention to a recent article I read about the FBI training their operatives in how to identify counterfeit money. They are trained to handle and recognise genuine currency, because the more the real money is handled, the easier the counterfeit ones will be identified. There will always be new ways of counterfeiting, but there will only ever be one genuine. Likewise we need to be doing more in modelling and teaching acceptable behaviour that is genuine, rather than legislating unacceptable behaviour out – which is so open to interpretation.

Our legal system is already bottlenecked. The last thing we need is more legislation to increase this bottleneck effect. The most important thing is for more education at an early stage where and when character is formed.

I take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to express "my right to be heard."

Yours Sincerely
Allan Cleanthous