

Submission 58

Lisburn Baptist Church

At a members' meeting held in Lisburn Baptist Church on Sunday 11 November 2001, it was decided to forward this letter which reflects the views and opinions of our congregation in relation to some of the proposals contained within the Draft Bill of Rights. Our average weekly congregation numbers 300-400 adults morning and evening.

At the outset, we wish to make it clear that as Christians worshipping in a Baptist church we are not opposed to the protection of citizens' rights as a concept, but we do have serious concerns over the range, extent and potential outworking of some of the clauses in the N.I. Human Rights Commission's proposed Bill of Rights. On a general point, increased permissiveness, width in legislation and insistence on the rights of the individual (without a corresponding emphasis on individual responsibility and accountability) has done little to arrest the decline in our society's fabric.

We realise that much has been guaranteed by the European Convention of Human Rights and its subsequent incorporation into United Kingdom law and whilst there have been decisions of the European Court of Human Rights that give rise to grave dissatisfaction, we do not believe that it is appropriate that the proposed Bill should seek to move into areas that have not been the subject of existing legislation.

It is our firm conviction that rights and responsibilities that are predicated upon God's word, the Bible, would form the most sound basis on which society could operate. Sadly, however, the people of the British Isles have largely turned their backs on such standards - a move which has already proven costly and which will continue to do so.

We particularly object to Clause 9 (b) (2) [Right to marry] which would open the door for legal recognition of same sex relationships. This is a step which contravenes God's word, does not reflect the view of Northern Ireland's wider society and does not provide a suitable basis for family life.

We are also concerned that the guarantees contained in Clause 12 (a) [Freedom of thought] could be undermined by other apparent rights, thus enabling Christian faith and practice to be impugned before the courts.

In considering your response to these matters we would ask that the views of Christians are neither marginalized nor ignored. Yours is a heavy responsibility and this letter represents serious and deeply held convictions and beliefs which should not be viewed lightly.

Thank you for your attention.
Yours sincerely
Desmond Black
Hon. Secretary