



The Church of Scotland

Church and Society Council

Official Response

SUBJECT: Defining Sectarianism in Scotland: supporting the work of the Scottish Government and the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland.

REQUESTED BY: The Scottish Government

REFERENCE: OR-2014/10

DATE: 29 September 2014

SUBMITTED BY: David Bradwell, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer, david@actsparl.org

ABOUT YOU: All personal information will be kept anonymous. The results from the collated responses will not be attributed to any individual or group of individuals.

	Individual	Organisation
Are you responding as an:		✓
If responding as an individual:		
Which town or city do you live in?		
Which local authority do you live in?		
If responding as an organisation:		
What is the name of your organisation?	The Church of Scotland	
How many people contributed to your response?	The Church of Scotland General Assembly had twice agreed a similar definition of sectarianism; it would be fair to say more than 1500 people have influenced it from all over Scotland. This particular response has been signed-off by the Church and Society Council, 32 geographically spread across Scotland, in consultation with ecumenical partners.	
Which towns or cities do those contributing to your response live in?		
Which local authority do those contributing to your response live in?		

QUESTIONS: All contributions will be collated and given to the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland to allow them to give further consideration to the working definition.

For individuals and organisations:

1.	How far do you think the definition captures the nature of sectarianism in Scotland from your experience?
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Comment:

We are pleased that the definition we have used (originally formulated by Joseph Liechty of the Irish School of Ecumenics with Cecilia Clegg) has clearly formed the basis and the origin of the Scottish Government’s position, and much of the substantive content has been retained and improved on.

Our 2012 report on Sectarianism is available here:

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/9591/Sectarianism_final.pdf

2. What might be missing from it from your perspective?

Comment:

- There appears to be a word missing in the opening sentence – “Sectarianism in Scotland is a complex set of perceptions...”
- Our definition states “It arises as a distorted expression of human needs, especially for belonging, identity and the freedom of expression of difference”, whereas the Scottish Government definition reads only “It arises from a distorted expression of identity and belonging.” The recognition that this phenomenon is part of the human condition, and has its roots in fear and a desperate desire to belong is crucial to understanding and appreciating ways to overcome sectarianism. The Government’s abridged version misses out on this crucial point and which then seeks to blame the individuals holding sectarian attitudes for being distorted, and so ignoring the systemic, historical and cultural factors which need to be regarded as equally valid. Restoring the connection with human needs is a simple but clear way of pointing out that it is an issue which goes beyond just upbringing, football or bad behaviour but is something deep rooted in human psychology – in the Church we might talk about it being a matter of the soul. It is about the link to power and resisting change to the status-quo: fear of such change drives sectarianism and helps to define it.

3. Do you think the definition is easily understandable?

Yes

No

✓

Comment:

No comment.

4. Would you suggest any changes to the definition?

Comment:

As follows:

“Sectarianism in Scotland is a complex set of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, actions and structures, at personal and communal levels, which originate in religious difference and can involve a negative mixing of religion with politics, sporting allegiance and national identifications. It arises ~~as from~~ a distorted expression of human needs, especially for identity, and belonging, and the freedom of expression of difference. It is expressed in destructive patterns of relating which segregate, exclude, discriminate against or are violent towards a specified or perceived religious, political, sporting or national ‘other’, with significant personal and social consequences.”

For organisations:

5.	How far is this definition relevant to your organisations work?
	a. If so, in what way?
	<p>Comment:</p> <p>The adaptation of the Church’s own working definition is helpful, in that it is clearly rooted in our own tradition and outlook.</p>
	b. If not, why not?
	<p>Comment:</p> <p>The last line introduces “a specified religious other”, but earlier in the definition it is clear that this is also mixed with “politics, sporting allegiance and national identifications”. It may be helpful to expand this final section accordingly, as suggested above.</p>
6.	How might you use this definition in your work?
	<p>Comment:</p> <p>If, or when, the Church next comes to review its policy and outlook on sectarianism, it may well decide to use this adapted version of its own definition as a starting point.</p>