

Joan Smith

Joan Smith is a columnist, critic and novelist. She has written columns for *The Independent on Sunday* and *The Guardian* and her reviews appear in the *Financial Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Independent*. She is one of the presenters on *What the Papers Say* and a regular contributor to BBC radio.

In November 2011 she gave evidence to the Leveson enquiry into press and media standards and repeated the claim that she has persistently adhered to in her writings that the press is misogynistic

"Religion is only one strand in the way human beings construct their identity, and frequently a very divisive one. It actively encourages exclusivity, encouraging people to think in terms of their difference from the rest of humanity, rather than what we all have in common. It's because of that divisive tendency in religions that I think the most urgent task facing us is to ensure that that framework is based on secular values. What I advocate is a shift away from the kind of collective and coercive moral structure associated with religion, to one that combines modern individualism with a human rights framework." "I don't want Christian schools or Islamic schools any more than I want atheist schools or republican schools or feminist schools. I mean I happen to agree with all those three ideologies, and that's how I describe myself, but I don't want children indoctrinated in that, and I think the purpose of education is to give children choice." "It has also become apparent that, far from having a monopoly on goodness, Christians are no more likely than atheists to behave well to their fellow human beings. On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church had a deplorable record of colluding with fascism throughout the 20th century, from the congratulations it bestowed on General Franco after the Spanish civil war, to its recent efforts on behalf of General Pinochet." "It is perfectly clear that you can be committed to equality and justice without being told to subscribe to them by a higher authority. The movement towards establishing universal human rights, in the form of international conventions and domestic law, is being driven as much by atheists and agnostics as believers. On the contrary, if you are not distracted by the prospect of an afterlife, it is all the more important to change the society we live in now and that we will hand on to future generations." "Clerics may disapprove of Prozac, but fairy stories are all they have to offer as an antidote to the human condition."