

Not a member? The most tangible way of supporting our work is by becoming a member and contributing funds to enable us to campaign effectively; the more we have, the more we can do. If you believe, as we do, that a secular Britain is our best chance to achieve true equality for all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, then please [join us](#) and become part of what is possibly the most important debate of the 21st century. Together we can create a fairer and more equal society.

Quotes of the Week

“... by reiterating his commitment to free and faith schools, David Cameron demonstrates his government is a causal factor in the very segregation he deplors.”

Stephen Knight, *Godless Spellchecker* blog.

“... if we had to pick any one part of society that we wish to be a microcosm of our society as a whole, it is our schools ... If our schools are not inclusive, our society cannot be.”

Ted Cattle, *iCoCo Foundation*.

Essays of the Week

[Sticks and stones: the use of anti-secular discourse in Britain.](#)

Steven Kettell, *LSE blogs*.

[The British Sikh men trying to stop women marrying outside their religion.](#)

Sunny Hundal, *Independent*.

Former Anglican bishop Peter Ball jailed as victims sue Church of England over ‘cover-up’

Peter Ball, the former Bishop of Gloucester and Lewes, has been sentenced to 32 months in prison after pleading guilty to offences against 18 teenagers and young men – allegations Ball denied for over twenty years.

The prosecution said that for Ball "religion was a cloak behind which he hid in order to satisfy his sexual interest in those who trusted him".

The court heard that police documents in the 1990s revealed they received telephone calls of support for the disgraced bishop from dozens of people, including MPs, former public school headmasters, magistrates and a judge. In addition, his defence team claimed to have more than 'two thousand letters of support... including letters from cabinet ministers and Royal Family,' said prosecutor Bobbie Cheema-Grubb QC at the Old Bailey.

Keith Porteous Wood, National Secular Society executive director, commented: "Such volumes could not have been achieved without an huge orchestrated campaign. Copies of the letters should be examined, as complete a list as possible of writers and callers obtained, particularly for those of high profile as their support would have been especially influential. It should be established whose idea this was, who masterminded it and who carried it out.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has recently commissioned an independent review of how the Church dealt with the allegations, but the National Secular Society has expressed concerns that the review will not have the scope required to establish the full extent of wrongdoing.

Speaking after sentence was handed down, Mr Wood said: "Much more important than Ball's sentence is that this case has demonstrated the power the Church which has even recently bullied victims into silence and sought to curry favour with the law to let off perpetrators, or let them off lightly and impose reporting restrictions.

"Ball's case is a disgraceful catalogue of the legal system letting him off at every juncture. Just last month, two serious charges were inexplicably ordered to 'lay on the court file' - presumably to be ignored at least until Ball becomes too old or unfit to stand trial, a ruse he has already tried.

"Abuse victims' lives are often ruined by the abuse, they are much more likely to be substance abusers and vulnerable to suicidal impulses. One of Ball's victims, Neil Todd, killed himself and another, Graham Sawyer of Briercliffe, said that he had wished at times that he were dead. He was adamant that 'people at the highest levels of the Church are more concerned with 'saving face'."

Mr Wood said there were numerous examples of this evident in Ball's case alone.

"Evidence abounds of an institutional culture of intimidation of victims, in effect compounding the abuse, robbing the victims of justice, and not just allowing the perpetrator to escape justice, but enabling them to continue the abuse.

"The extent to which the Church's attitude has changed is as yet unclear. Several survivors were recently [reported](#) to have been told by Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham (responsible for dealing with abuse), that 'the Church was too busy working on banking reform' to have time for abuse responses, and [his statement](#) when Ball pleaded guilty was perfunctory, given the depth of the Church's complicity and the extent to which that had increased the suffering of victims. Sawyer maintains that Bishop Butler 'is out of his depth, and should step aside'.

"The first step in a change of culture that this case demonstrates to be so necessary is that employees and volunteers in all organisations involved with minors, including religious ones, should make reporting of reasonable suspicion of child abuse mandatory, with failure a dismissible offence. And the law should be amended to make the failure of those working in such institutions to do so a criminal offence."

Mr Wood is calling for the Lowell Goddard led Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse to fully examine not just the Church's role, but also the part played by the Crown Prosecution Service, by police and by politicians.

In the 1990s the CPS assured then-Archbishop Carey that no further action would be taken against Bishop Ball after he [accepted a caution](#) and resigned.

The [Guardian](#) reported that the court was told "MPs, a lord chief justice the royal family and public school headmasters all intervened" to stop Peter Ball from being prosecuted in the 1990s.

The National Secular Society has set-out [twenty questions](#) which an inquiry must answer on the relationship between the Church and police, and why the CPS did not take matters further when allegations against Ball were made. The CPS have now [admitted](#) that Ball should have been prosecuted two decades ago when the claims about sex abuse were made.

Victims are suing the Church of England for compensation amounting to "hundreds of thousands of pounds" over their handling of the case.

The Church of England has [offered](#) "an unreserved apology to all the survivors".

Peter Ball sex abuse case: 20 questions that must be answered

Any genuine inquiry into the handling of allegations of child sex abuse by Bishop Peter Ball must answer key questions about alleged cover-ups by the Church, police and CPS, argues Keith Porteous Wood

The National Secular Society has been closely monitoring cases of clerical child abuse where religious organisations have systematically evaded and denied secular justice to victims. These cover-ups have enabled perpetrators to escape justice entirely and even reoffend. The perception is widely held that the Catholic Church is the chief offender. But cases are increasingly emerging within the Anglican Church.

Unlike his counterparts at the Vatican, however, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is to be commended for [initiating an independent review](#) into a serious abuse case, involving Ex-Bishop of Lewes Peter Ball.

Already in the public domain, there is *prime facie* evidence of spectacular abuses of process in the Ball case by the Church, and all arms of the law.

The seriousness of these offences and the long term damage to victims cannot be overstated. Shielding alleged perpetrators compounds their abuse.

There can be a no more bitter example than that of Neal Todd, who was one of Peter Ball's victims. "[After] church officials pleaded with [Neal Todd's] family not to go to the police", Neal (like a significant proportion of other abuse survivors) "attempted suicide because he feared the bishops in Dulwich and Chichester would not act on his claims." (*Press Association* 12/3/93). 20 years later Neal killed himself, in the same year that Sussex police opened a new case and [more victims came forward](#).

Ball may have gotten away with it in 1992, and kept his diocese until retirement, had it not been that the allegation was made in Brixton, London about an alleged offence in the Gloucester area. (PA 16/12/92) Could it be that an allegation made to police in Lewes or Gloucester may not have been taken as seriously? Is it really likely that no complaints were made to East Sussex police?

Now facing sentence Ball is saying how sorry he is, but contrition is not evident in his actions. He maintained his innocence until 2015, when pleading guilty to the abuse of 18 young men saved him undergoing a trial, despite having been cautioned for similar activities in 1992. A caution, which itself helped him escape trial on much more serious charges. On that occasion there was an informal intervention with the Crown Prosecution Service by then Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey. Lord Carey seemingly wanting the caution to be an indemnity or amnesty, and [explained](#) to the Press Association (8/9/15): "I was troubled. I do not think this was good enough. I wanted some form of assurance. All we had was the resignation of Bishop Peter. I was worried that if any other allegations of past decency were made to reignite. I wanted some assurance of this would not be the case."

As late as this year Ball sought to abort the case against him and deny justice to his victims: The Press Association [reported](#): "Mr Justice Sweeney refused to dismiss the case on a legal technicality after it emerged Ball and former archbishop Lord Carey had been assured in 1993 that there would be no future action."

Before the former bishop gets much older, I urge the prosecuting authorities to reconsider their decision and if appropriate charge him for all credible allegations using the same offences as they would for any ordinary member of the public. This includes "indecent assaults on two other teenage boys, one in Eastbourne in the late 1970s and one in Litlington in the early 1980s. The CPS decided not to proceed with these charges and the court ordered that they should lay on the court file." (Sussex Police 8/9/15)

The Church of England's [review](#) "will examine the Church of England's co-operation with the police and other statutory agencies and the extent to which it shared information in a timely manner, identifying both good practice and shortcomings alike".

It is not clear how that co-operation can be thoroughly investigated without the complete co-operation of these statutory agencies, which is by no means a foregone conclusion given the answers could be damaging, possibly even incriminating.

It seems implausible that abuse on such a scale could have gone unpunished for so long without the Church itself dissuading victims from going to the authorities. Any institutional pressure to dissuade the reporting of ostensibly criminal offences needs to be uncovered and investigated with as much thoroughness as the abuse itself. Any such pressure from the Church may itself be unlawful, but - far worse - is likely to have contributed to the continuance of criminal abuse of victims.

Below is a list of questions that need to be answered. In each case where the identity of an official is requested it should also be ascertained on whose authority they acted and who (including politicians) was the most senior person instructing and the most senior person aware.

Some will have to await Justice Lowell Goddard, who has been tasked with chairing the Government's [own inquiry into child abuse](#), and I imagine she will also wish to check the answers arrived at by the Church's review:

1. All known victims of Ball, and the family of Neal Todd should be asked about any pressure that was put on them and whether they have anything else to contribute, including whether they know of other victims.
2. The full circumstances of Ball's 1992 caution should be carefully examined. Who is the most senior politician or official who agreed that [despite](#) "sufficient admissible substantial and reliable evidence" the CPS was prepared to deal with the matter [out of court](#)?
3. Similarly, which CPS official reportedly told Ball that the caution [included](#) "all other offences of the same nature" and why? Which police officer [said](#) to Ball after the caution and on whose authority: "Bishop, it's all over"?
4. Lord Carey is [quoted](#) on his interaction with the Crown Prosecution Service. "I was supplied with a number of a man at the CPS I believed to be a director. I do not recall his name." Lord Carey should be asked why he (presumably requested and) was given the – presumably personal number of someone very senior in the CPS, for example who obtained it and on what pretext?
5. Which senior officer in the CPS - and on whose authority – reportedly [assured](#) Lord Carey late one evening, that "[Ball] has resigned. He is out of it. The matter is closed. We are not going to take anything any further." Lord Carey does not recall who this was but is/was this recorded anywhere, for example in private secretary records?
6. What was the justification [behind the 1992 plea-bargaining](#), "which meant far worse charges dropped and Ball was allowed to walk away free", who took responsibility for it and was it handled appropriately, especially from the perspective of victims and/or was it motivated by undue leniency to Ball? What representations did the Church make and who made them?

7. Sussex police said Ball was released the same day he was arrested in 2012 on [medical advice](#). That advice needs to be reviewed and assessed, as to its accuracy and whether the police acted appropriately, was the medical advice in writing, who gave it. Would an ordinary member of the public have been released in similar circumstances and broadly how many are annually from the place Ball was released?
8. The [Guardian](#) reported: "Over the next 19 years Ball's name came up in at least three police investigations into sexual abuse by Church of England priests, but he was never charged. Allegations against him also surfaced in at least three official inquiries into decades of child protection failures in the diocese of Chichester, of which Lewes is part." A thorough review should be undertaken into these investigations and enquiries, as, if correctly reported, such impunity suggests protection from a very high level indeed. The names of those recommending that Ball not be charged and who else was consulted in reaching this decision should be established, together with full details of Church involvement and representations. The opening up of investigations into other suspects should be considered, at least by reference to the alleged victims where possible.
9. Abuse victim Phil Johnson, who reportedly "sits on the Church of England's national safeguarding panel" should be asked to expand on his statement to the [Guardian](#): "[He] alleged 19 years ago that Ball had sexually abused him as a 13-year-old boy, [and] said the last two decades amounted to an establishment cover-up." Ball "is very well connected," said Johnson. "There has been pressure on the police ever since 1993 when all this first emerged. It's been going on for years... There are many, many victims who have fought for a long time to see him face justice and have not been believed. The Church and the establishment have colluded in covering up bishop Peter Ball's offending at the highest level over very many years."
10. Have the 18 young men Ball admitted abusing (except the one who has committed suicide) been consulted about the decision not to proceed to trial in exchange for him pleading guilty to abuse? Was it fair to victims and/or was it motivated by undue leniency to Ball?
11. Is there an inconsistency between "It was not until 2012, after several inquiries, that the Church finally released documents to the police" ([Guardian 8/9/15](#)), and Bishop Paul Butler's [statement of 8/9/15](#) "as a Church we have provided full co-operation with the police throughout their investigation, which was backed up by the police" and Sussex Police's similarly-worded endorsement: "As well as having the full co-operation of the Church throughout our investigation, and a close working relationship with the CPS, I also recognise the hard work and dedication of my team of detectives who have worked on this case for more than three years."
12. Who has borne Ball's legal fees throughout - his barrister is currently Richard Smith QC.
13. Was Ball given, as reported, a licence to officiate, apparently until 2010; who gave this licence, and who knew about it in the senior echelons of the Church? ([Guardian 9/9/15](#))
14. How much has been spent needlessly by the police, CPS and courts as a result of Ball's denial of offences that he has later admitted?
15. Who imposed [reporting restrictions](#)? On whose request? And were they appropriate?
16. According to the [Lantern Project](#): "[Victims] hesitated in reporting to police for fear of reprisals from Church Authorities if they pursued their allegations: a number had previously reported Peter Ball to church authorities in the late 1980s and early 1990s and had been severely criticised and condemned by church officials up to and including Lambeth Palace." Lantern should be asked to expand on this.
17. The former Bishop of Chichester, Eric Kemp, unambiguously portrayed Ball as the victim of [mischief makers](#) in his (2006) memoirs: "Although it was not realized at the time, the circumstances which led to [Ball's] early resignation were the work of mischief-makers. It was a very sad end to his ministry and his departure was a real loss to the Church which was, no doubt,

what those who brought it about intended." Kemp has been [described](#) as "one of the leading Anglo-Catholics of his generation and one of the most influential figures in the Church of England in the last quarter of the twentieth century." Although Kemp has since died attempts should be made to establish if there is any evidence to suggest this was made in bad faith. It seems implausible he did not know of Ball's activities.

18. On ITV London news on 5 October 2015 Rev Graham Sawyer of Briercliffe said he had been abused by a bishop (Ball) and because he would not be silent was refused ordination in England and the only way he could become ordained was to do so abroad, he did so in the Antipodes. He said, echoing the case of Neal Todd, that he had wished at times that he were dead because of the Church's attitude. Sawyer told the [Church of England Newspaper](#) that "there is a 'fundamental bankruptcy' in the Church's handling of survivor responses, saying that the problem is that the people at the highest levels of the Church are more concerned with 'saving face.'" He said he was prompted to do so because the Church's bishop in charge of handling abuse, Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham, told him "the Church was too busy working on banking reform over abuse responses". Lantern and others making these allegations should be invited to provide more detailed evidence.

19. The full extent of the Church's representations to the police, the CPS and others in authority over the case of Ball should be examined. There needs to be a full inquiry into the extent of co-operation with the police by the Church including in Lambeth Palace and Church House. There needs to be a review of all child abuse files held by the Church, including who holds them, what process there is for ensuring they are reviewed, who has reviewed them and taken responsibility for action or no action. This especially applies in Ball's case.

20. The Bishop of Durham, in charge of dealing with abuse, claims the Church has "robust procedures and policies in place". Does this include immediate mandatory reporting of reasonable suspicions of abuse to the police, and specify that failure to do so constitutes a dismissible offence? If not the policies must immediately be changed; if it does, are there examples of breaches not being subject to disciplinary sanction?

Keith Porteous Wood is the executive director of the National Secular Society. The views expressed in our blogs are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the NSS.

Cameron announces plans to regulate religious supplementary schools

Prime Minister David Cameron has announced plans for Ofsted to inspect madrassas and other supplementary religious schools and to close down those that preach "hate".

Delivering his speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Mr Cameron expressed his concern that some supplementary schools are helping to "incubate divisions" within society and announced that if a supplementary school is teaching children for more than eight hours a week then it will be required to register with the Department for Education.

Around [250,000 students](#) attend religious supplementary schools in England alone, and there are thought to be up to 2000 madrassas.

The Prime Minister said, "in some madrassas we've got children being taught that they shouldn't mix with people of other religions; being beaten; swallowing conspiracy theories about Jewish people. These children should be having their minds opened; their horizons broadened, not having their heads filled with poison and their hearts filled with hate."

Some Muslim 'leaders' complained about the allegations and claimed that a "securitised approach" would "feed into a grievance narrative".

The Muslim Council of Britain said: "We would hope that these serious allegations can be substantiated and the evidence brought forward, so that appropriate action can be taken."

The National Secular Society, which has long [called for registration](#) and regulation of supplementary schools, cautiously welcomed the Prime Minister's words and said the proposal, if properly and fairly implemented, would be good news for anyone who wants to see a better integrated Britain.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "There is clearly a danger in allowing madrassas and other supplementary schools to operate unchecked. There's no good reason why children and young people attending religious educational institutions shouldn't receive the same level of protection as those attending mainstream nurseries and after school clubs.

"Even in religious schools already registered with Ofsted we've seen numerous examples of narrow hard-line teaching and extremism, including children from Muslim backgrounds being banned for ['socialising with outsiders'](#)."

"There are ample warning signs to indicate that young people attending supplementary schools need to be safeguarded and protected from all forms of harm, including the kind of separatist and intolerant teaching that risks poisoning young minds and causing lasting damage to the fabric of British society."

The move to better regulate supplementary schools, which will include madrassas, Sunday schools and Jewish yeshivas represents a change of heart from the Government, which in 2012 rejected calls from the NSS for better regulation. The then Children & Families Minister, Tim Loughton MP, told the NSS that he was not convinced of any need to regulate such 'schools', despite clear evidence of abuse.

Undercover filming of some madrassas in 2011 [revealed](#) the teaching of intolerance towards non-Muslims, criticism of more moderate Muslims, ridicule of other religions and violence against pupils.

Also in 2011, a [BBC investigation](#) revealed that over 400 allegations of physical abuse (and 30 of sexual abuse) were made at madrassas in Britain in the preceding three years. A senior prosecutor told the BBC that these figures were likely to represent only the 'tip of an iceberg'. Nazir Afzal, the chief crown prosecutor for the North West of England, said the figures were "a significant underestimate".

In his speech to Conference the Prime Minister insisted that there would be no more "passive tolerance". He said such an approach had turned Britain into a less integrated country and "put our children in danger". He said he wanted people who organise forced marriages to be prosecuted and parents who take their children to have their genitals mutilated to be arrested.

Mr Cameron also used his speech to reiterate his vision of turning every school an academy. However, the National Secular Society warned that plans to take every school in the country out of local authority control was likely to result in religious organisations [gaining much greater control](#) of publicly funded education with insufficient accountability.

Vague 'Extremism Disruption Orders' will chill free speech

The National Secular Society and the Christian Institute have joined together to launch a new campaign, [Defend Free Speech](#), in opposition to proposed 'Extremism Disruption Orders'.

While much of the Government's anti-extremism agenda is supported by the NSS, the Society and the Christian Institute share serious concerns that vaguely defined 'Extremism Disruption Orders'

(EDOs) will limit free speech and be used to target a whole range of non-violent individuals who hold orthodox religious views or other beliefs which may fall under a broad definition of "extremism".

National Secular Society campaigns manager, Stephen Evans, commented: "It's fair to say that the Christian Institute and the National Secular Society don't see eye-to-eye on many issues. But we both agree on the need to defend freedom of expression, and we share concerns that Extremism Disruption Orders will have a chilling effect on free speech.

"A vague definition of extremism could mean these measures catch all manner of individuals and groups, not just the Islamist extremists the Government hopes to tackle. There is already a sufficient range of powers and existing laws that police can use to combat extremism and incitement to hatred or violence. Any further legislation restricting free expression runs the serious risk of criminalising ordinary people for simply standing up for what they believe in."

Campaigners had hoped for more details about the plans in Home Secretary Theresa May's address to the Conservative Party conference, but her speech in Manchester made no mention of the proposed EDOs.

Mr Evans added: "It may be that the Government is hesitating about whether to push forward with the plans in the face of widespread opposition – something we would obviously welcome."

Chancellor George Osborne has said that Extremism Disruption Orders will go "beyond terrorism" and "eliminate extremism in all its forms".

Simon Calvert, Deputy Director for Public Affairs at the Christian Institute, argued that the Government's description of extremism "seems to include many minority, traditional or unpopular views.

"These will likely include many campaign groups, mainstream religious leaders, and outspoken atheists.

"The Government has decided that to tackle the scourge of extremism it will introduce a catch-all offence, and one which assumes guilt not innocence."

In addition to the free expression campaign mounted by the Christian Institute and the National Secular Society, the plans have been heavily criticised in the *Times*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Telegraph*.

Council of Europe “retreat” on circumcision of young boys

Jewish and Muslim groups have claimed victory after the Council of Europe 'retreated' over a proposed ban on male circumcision and instead recommended that it only be performed by trained individuals.

Religious campaigners had feared that the Council would call for a prohibition on the circumcision of young boys, and welcomed a [resolution](#) passed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on religious freedom that "recommends that member States provide for ritual circumcision of children not to be allowed unless practised by a person with the requisite training and skill, in appropriate medical and health conditions", but which does not call for an outright ban on the practice.

While the 'climb-down' has been welcomed by Muslim and Jewish campaigners seeking to defend male circumcision of children, the Council of Europe resolution does make a point of referring to an earlier [2013 resolution](#) which described male circumcision as a "violation of children's physical integrity".

Ofer Aderet, of [Haaretz](#), said "I believe it's a retreat from the previous resolution ... because in 2013, circumcision was cast in a negative light along with a string of horrific practices like female genital mutilation whereas the new resolution speaks of circumcision as part of freedom of worship, which needs to be preserved."

PACE is a statutory organ of the Council of Europe dedicated to upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Its powers extend only to the ability to investigate, recommend and advise.

The recently passed resolution notes that "Certain religious practices remain controversial within national communities. Albeit in different ways, the wearing of full-face veils, circumcision of young boys and ritual slaughter are divisive issues and the Assembly is aware of the fact that there is no consensus among Council of Europe member States on these matters."

While the Council stresses that circumcision of young boys must be performed "by a person with the requisite training and skill" it does not specify what training is required, or what the "appropriate" conditions for circumcision are.

The 2013 resolution instructed members states to "publicly condemn the most harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, and pass legislation banning these" but on male circumcision said only that states must "clearly define the medical, sanitary and other conditions to be ensured for practices which are today widely carried out in certain religious communities, such as the non-medically justified circumcision of young boys".

In a [statement](#) on the new resolution, the Council called for freedom of religion "without impediment and without discrimination" and it called for "'reasonable accommodations' for controversial religious practices, in particular in the workplace" – language criticised by the National Secular Society.

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "We absolutely support freedom of thought, conscience and religion, but the right to religious freedom isn't absolute and doesn't permit believers to infringe on the freedoms, rights or dignity of others. Council of Europe parliamentarians could be much clearer about that."

The Council said that "Religious communities should be able to exercise the right to freedom of religion 'without impediment and without discrimination' and to practise their faith publicly and freely in accordance with their own rites" but added that the principle of politics being independent from religion should be respected.

It also said that "education is the key to combating ignorance" and for building more inclusive societies in Europe.

National Secular Society calls for integrated education at EU colloquium on combatting religious hatred

The National Secular Society has spoken out at a meeting of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) on religious intolerance to call for integrated schools that promote citizenship and human rights.

The European Commission's first annual colloquium on fundamental rights was held to discuss ways to foster tolerance and respect and fight antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe.

A Eurobarometer poll published ahead of the event revealed that 50% of Europeans believe religious discrimination is widespread.

The FRA found that (56%) think there will be no change in relations between people of other faiths and cultures, but around a quarter (23%) expect relations to worsen and only 14% think they will get better.

In interventions at the two-day colloquium in Brussels, National Secular Society executive director Keith Porteous Wood highlighted the importance of integrated education to combat religious hatred and sectarianism, and called on schools to be required to actively promote shared citizenship and human rights.

Mr Wood highlighted the [research](#) of Irene Bruegel which found that the most effective way to achieve real integration is for children of all religious backgrounds to be educated together from primary level.

Though the Society is deeply troubled by the rise in religiously-motivated hate crimes and by sectarian attacks, Mr Wood warned the colloquium against the introduction of "knee jerk legislation" to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred – pointing out that existing hate speech legislation in the UK already prohibited incitement to racial and religious hatred.

Commenting on the event, NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans suggested a more secular outlook would greatly improve Europe's chances of foster tolerance and respect in our societies.

"Secularism has a key role to play in ensuring people of all faiths and none can live together peacefully and harmoniously. Particularly at a time of significant demographic change, it is essential that European states robustly defend and promote key secular principles that enable us to live and let live – but within clear limits. The alternative is a future of sectarian conflict and competitive religious grievance and demands", he said.

Mr Evans also questioned the European Commission's use of the contentious term 'Islamophobia' in combatting hatred.

"Anti-Muslim bigotry will not and cannot be tackled effectively whilst the accusation of 'Islamophobia' is used to stymie criticism of Islam. People must be free to raise concerns about manifestations of Islam they consider hostile to Europe's secular liberal values. Any attempt to curtail the fundamental right of free speech in the hope of encouraging greater cohesion will be wholly counterproductive.

"Education is probably the best chance we have to stimulate future social harmony and cohesion, but that chance is being wasted by pursuing policies that promote faith-based and fragmented schooling. Rather than encouraging self-segregation we need to encourage an inclusive and secular education system which promotes universal, rather than religion-specific values and allows young people the autonomy to decide their religious outlook without coercion", he added.

The EU Fundamental Rights Agency [survey](#) on discrimination and hate crime against Jews shows rising antisemitism in Europe; 73% of respondents felt that antisemitism online has become worse over the last five years.

The FRA has said that antisemitism "in France, Denmark and elsewhere in the EU are part of a climate of intolerance that we must fight with all the means at our disposal."

"The EU and its Member States need to take immediate and decisive action to combat extremist, xenophobic and antisemitic discourse and crimes."

European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans [said](#) "it's a vital question for the future of Europe that our Jewish community feels at ease and completely at home."

50% of Europeans believe discrimination based on religion or beliefs is widespread (up from 39% in 2012).

Muslims suffer from the lowest levels of social acceptance of all religious groups, with only 61% of respondents stating that they would be fully comfortable with a colleague at work being Muslim, and only 43% being fully comfortable if their adult children had a relationship with a Muslim person.

Only six EU Member States in the survey show an improvement in perceptions of relations between people from different cultural or religious backgrounds or nationalities between 2013 and 2014, and all shifts towards more positive opinions are small.

See also: [Secularists call for commitment to free speech and civil society to challenge bigotry.](#)

NSS Speaks Out:

We were mentioned [twice](#) in [articles](#) on the website of the Christian Institute, with whom we are campaigning against 'Extremism Disruption Orders'.

Our campaigns manager Stephen Evans spoke on BBC Radio Cumbria about faith schools, and he was quoted in the [Isle of Wight County Press](#) on a planned school closure which will force children to attend faith schools.

The NSS was quoted on the sentencing of former bishop Peter Ball in the [Argus](#) and [Christian Today](#).

Upcoming Events:

For a full listing of all upcoming events see the [NSS website](#).

[Political skulduggery: what kept Charles Bradlaugh MP from taking his seat in Parliament?](#)

Date: Sunday 25 October | 11:00 and 14:00

Venue: Conway Hall Library, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Tickets: Free but booking essential

Charles Bradlaugh was and is not everyone's hero; Karl Marx and William Gladstone were united in hating him. Elected as a Liberal MP for Northampton in 1880, he was kept from taking his seat in Parliament for six long years. Allegedly for being an atheist, but could it have been for other reasons? Speaker Deborah Lavin believes that Bradlaugh deserves attention, not only for his atheism, republicanism and struggle to take his seat, but for his 10-year working relationship with Annie Besant and their joint trial in 1877 under the Obscene Publications Act for publishing a pamphlet about birth control. If you have any questions, please contact parliamentinthemaking@parliament.uk.

Newsline provides links to external websites for information and in the interests of free exchange. We do not accept any responsibility for the content of those sites, nor does a link indicate approval or imply endorsement of those sites.

Please feel free to use the material in this *Newsline* with appropriate acknowledgement of source. Neither *Newsline* nor the NSS is responsible for the content of websites to which it provides links. Nor does the NSS or *Newsline* necessarily endorse quotes and comments by contributors, they are brought to you in the interests of the free exchange of information and open debate.

National Secular Society, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL, United Kingdom.

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7404 3126

www.secularism.org.uk