

Bulletin

national
secular
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challenging religious privilege

IT'S A SIN



**CHURCH OF ENGLAND AFFIRMS
OPPOSITION TO GAY SEX**

**ROYALS CANVASSED ON
THEIR STANCE**

**NSS: OUT-OF-TOUCH CHURCH
NEEDS TO SEPARATE
FROM STATE**

**ALSO IN THIS
EDITION:**

Collective worship
and RE in NI schools
breach human rights

'De facto blasphemy
laws' strike again

Remembering
Terry Sanderson





A homophobic church shouldn't enjoy state patronage

The struggle for LGBT equality has often been a struggle against organised religion. Conservative religious views have long fuelled the fire of opposition to LGBT rights and same-sex marriage. The profound harms that such attitudes have inflicted on sexual minorities globally cannot be underestimated.

The ongoing secularisation of Britain has seen secular values win favour over religious values – bringing significant advances for LGBT equality. Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation has been outlawed and same-sex marriage introduced. But the ‘official’ state religion is lagging behind.

In August, the archbishop of Canterbury affirmed the validity of a 1998 church declaration that gay sex is “incompatible with scripture”. His church still rejects same-sex marriage.

The church’s doctrine is its own affair,

but UK citizens are entitled to expect that its views have no bearing on the workings of the state.

Yet, due to its established status, the church enjoys state patronage, automatic places in the House of Lords, a leading role in our national ceremonies and control over thousands of state-funded schools. All this means its anti-gay positions have a significant impact on the wider pursuit of equality for LGBT people.

An established church that fails to reflect the values of the nation has no business being regarded as the nation’s church. The whole concept of a ‘state church’ should be consigned to history. In this edition you can read about our latest campaign to bring about disestablishment.

A true leading light in the campaign for both disestablishment and gay rights was Terry Sanderson, our former

president, who died in June. Terry started campaigning for gay rights in 1969 and joined the National Secular Society in the 1990s. Terry recognised that resistance to gay rights was rooted in traditional religious beliefs – and felt strongly that such beliefs shouldn’t have a privileged place in society.

Terry’s presidency was instrumental in revitalising the NSS and turning it into the effective campaigning organisation it is today. He was a huge inspiration to me, and I am determined to ensure that his legacy will live on.

But we have much work to do. The recent attack on Salman Rushdie and the rolling back of reproductive rights in America are grim reminders of the havoc that religious fundamentalism can wreak on liberal democracies. There can be no room for complacency. Your support will ensure that we remain on the front line of resistance.

One step closer to freer, fairer weddings for all

For several years we’ve been working with the Law Commission to reform the outdated wedding laws in England and Wales. Now, the commission has published its proposals, many of which are in line with our recommendations:

- Introducing universal legal rules for all weddings, with very few exceptions.
- Replacing the Christian-centric, building-based system with one based on officiants – which means weddings can take place virtually anywhere.
- Abolishing the prohibition on religious songs and readings at civil ceremonies (provided the ceremony is still identifiably ‘civil’).
- Enabling weddings conducted by non-religious belief organisations to be legally recognised.
- New offences criminalising officiants who mislead anyone into thinking they are legally married when they are not. This will help protect people, particularly women in Muslim communities, from unknowingly entering religion-only marriages that offer no legal protections.

We’re asking all our members in England and Wales to write to their MP in support of the recommendations. For more information please go to secularism.org.uk/marriage-equality

Meanwhile, Northern Ireland will adopt proposals backed by ourselves to raise the minimum marriage age to 18, in line with similar reforms which will come into effect in England and Wales next year. At present, people aged 16 and 17 can enter marriage with parental consent, putting them at risk of forced marriage – particularly in conservative religious communities.

NI’s marriage reforms will also allow couples to have their marriage legally solemnised by a celebrant who subscribes to a non-religious philosophy (such as humanism). The legislation can only be enacted once there is a functioning NI Assembly and Executive.



Remembering Terry Sanderson

We are sad to report our former president Terry Sanderson died from cancer on 12 June 2022, aged 75.

The son of a miner, Terry grew up in the village of Maltby near Rotherham. Money was so tight that his family regularly pawned their stair carpet.

Keen to mitigate the loneliness and homophobia suffered by gay people in the 1970s, Terry bravely set up a local campaigning and social group and started a gay mail order business from his tiny bedroom. He also took on the local council to host a gay disco – and won.

His monthly column for *Gay Times*, a critique of homophobia in the media, entailed reading every major newspaper for a quarter of

a century from 1983. His running battle with media regulators over the then-rampant homophobia in print was a great service to gay rights. Such bile had fanned homophobia in society, and largely eliminating it broke this vicious cycle.

It was during this time he met his lifelong partner, Keith Porteous Wood, our current president.

Equally transformative were his array of gay self-help books, especially *How to be a Happy Homosexual* first published in 1986. It went through numerous editions and was translated into several languages.

Terry's career as a journalist and his campaigning on gay rights fostered

skills that would prove invaluable when he joined the NSS.

He founded the NSS e-newsletter Newline, which became hugely popular and continues to be sent weekly to subscribers. He also wrote numerous opinion pieces – particularly for the Guardian's *Comment is Free* – and shared out radio interviews with Keith.

In 1996 he suggested that Keith give up high flying finance and start a second career with the NSS. They worked together tirelessly to revivify the NSS, which at that stage had only a few hundred members and only one paid employee.

Terry served on the NSS council from 2000 and was president from 2006 until 2017.

Of his achievements at the NSS, Terry was proudest of promoting a clear secularist vision in our organisation's constitution that protects



“25 years ago when I was discovering the delights of coming out, Terry's journalism and books were an eye-opener – always rational and indignant, effortlessly on the high moral ground.”

Sir Ian McKellen

the rights of all, and our campaign leading to the abolition of blasphemy laws – not to mention being the brains behind the huge demonstration against Pope Benedict's visit to London in 2010.

Terry noted the irony of society's growing acceptance of homosexuality contributing to the demise of the churches, given the harm they had meted out to gay people. Back in the 1960s, he had thought homophobia to be unstoppable, while the power of the churches would dissipate. It was his growing realisation that the opposite was more likely that drove him into fighting for secularism.

Terry died at home, as he wanted. A little over a month before he died, he announced his imminent demise on Facebook, ending with: “Goodbye and try to be kind to each other”. Few live to read their eulogies, but this prompted an outpouring of heartfelt responses complimenting him on his achievements and paying tribute to his warmth.

Terence Arthur Sanderson

17 November 1946, Maltby, S. Yorkshire
– 12 June 2022, London

This Man Spent 25 Years Fighting Newspapers Over Their Anti-Gay Reporting And Finally Won

BuzzFeed News



Terry Sanderson, Keith Porteous Wood and Stephen Evans at the Protest the Pope march in 2010

“I want you to know how much I admire and appreciate the magnificent contribution you have made over so many decades, from Gay Times Media Watch monthly column for 25 years to How To be a Happy Homosexual, your superb work that transformed the National Secular Society into such an effective and influential organisation – and much more.

After you are gone, your legacy will remain.”

Peter Tatchell, human rights activist

THE TIMES | Saturday August 6 2022

Remembering loved ones

Compassionate gay rights activist, secularist and Dietrich devotee

Terry Sanderson, 75

It wasn't until Terry Sanderson's parents read in a local newspaper of their sons campaigning for a council function room for single-sex dances that they realised he was gay. It was the late 1970s, in Maltby, a mining town in South Yorkshire, and although Terry's parents were supportive, his sexuality "wasn't talked about", he said.

"I hated the contempt and cruelty that was shown to anyone 'found out' to be gay and I became determined to do my bit to change things," he wrote at the start of a courageous lifelong campaign to change the public perception of homosexuality.

One of his first moves in the wake of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 was to set up in 1974 a mail-order publishing business, Essentially Gay, from his bedroom, importing literature and self-help guides from the US. Although of innocent content, the books were frequently impounded at



Terry Sanderson wrote Mediawatch

Customs and Excise. In 1984 books worth £1,600 were seized. It led Terry to close the business down.

A year earlier he had written a piece for *Gay Times* about the media's negative coverage of gay people, particularly during the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and was asked to

turn it into a monthly column. Called Mediawatch, he compiled it for 25 years, reading every newspaper every day and steadfastly complaining to – and running fierce battles with – the media regulators.

At the same time Terry was working alongside the agony aunt Claire Rayner on her column in *Woman's Own*, and they became friends. When in 1986 he wrote: *How to be a Happy Homosexual*, Rayner wrote the foreword, describing it as "jam-packed with commonsense advice... should leave its readers feeling more relaxed about themselves and their lives".

The book was originally commissioned by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, but Terry ended up publishing it himself under The Other Way Press.

He went on to write other self-help books, including *A Stranger in the Family: How to Cope if Your Child is Gay*, but *Happy Homosexual* remained his bestselling title. It was published in other languages and ran to several editions and there was barely a

month when he wasn't thanked by readers for helping to transform their lives.

Terry Sanderson was born in 1946, the youngest of three boys, to Fred, a coal miner for 50 years, and Margaret (née Goodgrove). It was a childhood beset by money worries – Terry recalled the humiliation when one of his shoes fell apart during a school play – but family life was happy.

He left Maltby Secondary Modern at 15, tapping into his instinct for helping others, became a social worker. Working with adults with learning difficulties, he started in the 1970s at the Sessheroff unit at Rotherham hospital, moved in the mid-1980s to Friern Hospital, north London, and finally to Ealing, west London. He retired at 57 in 2004.

In 1981 he met Keith Porteous Wood, a finance director and they entered a civil partnership in 2006. Keith was also the executive director of the National Secular Society, and Terry, already a member, became more actively involved in it, founding a weekly newsletter, NSS Newline.

His experiences in gay activism had convinced him that much opposition to homosexuality was based on religious doctrine and his instinct was to try to limit the ability of religious organisations to impose their beliefs on others. From 2006 to 2017 he was NSS president, and oversaw a shift in the organisation's focus from atheism to secularism.

In 2008 the NSS played a role in the abolition of the blasphemy laws in England and Wales, and in 2010 Terry helped to organise a 20,000-strong protest against Pope Benedict's state visit, a march that stretched from Hyde Park Corner to Piccadilly Circus in London.

Away from campaigning, Terry was a devotee of Marlene Dietrich and collected memorabilia. He loved the films of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and each year put on a benefit screening at The Cinema Museum in Kennington. Humorous, courageous and considerate to the end, Terry signed off his last entry on Facebook with: "Goodbye – and try to be kind to each other."

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Readers' Lives

'It's a sin': Church's gay sex debate prompts calls for disestablishment

The lack of separation between church and state means the Church of England's business inevitably becomes everyone's business. So when the Church continues to uphold homophobic policies, this has serious implications for the state – including the monarchy.

In August the Church of England held its 15th Lambeth Conference – a meeting held every 10 years for Anglican bishops from around the world and chaired by the archbishop of Canterbury.

During a speech at this year's conference, under pressure from conservative Anglicans, Justin Welby reaffirmed a resolution known as Lambeth 1.10. This states that same-sex marriage is wrong and "homosexual practices" are incompatible with scripture.

Welby's speech has attracted widespread criticism – not least from many Anglicans who recognise the suffering this regressive position has inflicted upon gay people world over. Around the same time, Ghanaian bishops backed a proposed law that would lengthen jail terms for gay and trans people and force some to undergo so-called 'conversion therapy'.

The Anglican theological position on LGBT issues is really a matter for Anglicans. But due to the CofE's established status, its clergy have a specific legal duty to marry parishioners. So when the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act was introduced, the Church lobbied for a 'quadruple lock' to ensure the duty did not extend to same-sex couples.



The Church's stance on homosexuality is yet another symptom of how out of touch it is with the British people it claims to represent as the established church. And it sets up an intractable tension with the head of state.

NSS writes to the royals

The British monarch, as well as being head of state, also holds the title 'Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England'. The monarch is legally required to "join in communion" with the Church of England and promote Anglicanism in Britain.

A sovereign that seeks to act as a focus for national identity, unity and pride cannot, at the same time, be the supreme governor of an officially homophobic institution.

So following the Lambeth Conference, we wrote to Prince Charles and Prince William to ask if they agree with the Church's position on same-sex relationships, and for their message to their future gay, lesbian and bisexual subjects.

We pointed out that Prince William has previously spoken up for the rights of LGBT people. In 2019 the duke told an LGBT youth charity he would "fully support" his children if they were gay but would worry about the "discrimination that might come".

'It's a sin'

To raise awareness of the Church's increasingly anachronistic views on gay people, we have launched a campaign asking for those who support LGBT equality to lobby their MPs and join our call for disestablishment.

■ To join the campaign, go to secularism.org.uk/ItsASin

AN APPETITE FOR CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION

62%

Brits disagree bishops should still have a place in parliament

Source: Techne, April 2022

71%

Brits think it isn't important for the prime minister to be Christian

Source: Deltapoll July 2022

"IT'S A SIN"



Christian bias in the army

We've urged the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to ensure its welfare provision is fully inclusive of all service personnel, irrespective of religion or belief, following the publication of its new health and wellbeing strategy which says chaplaincy is "key to providing support and wellbeing to defence people".

In July we told the MoD

that former and currently serving members of the Armed Forces have raised concerns that chaplaincy is discriminatory.

Only ministers of a select group of eight 'sending churches', all Christian, may be chaplains of regular army units. The Armed Forces has appointed "advisers" for members of five other

faiths instead of chaplains, while there is no 'chaplain' equivalent for nonreligious personnel.

The 'sending churches' include denominations with anti-LGBT views, including the Free Church of Scotland, Elim Pentecostal Church and the Salvation Army.

Recent research into chaplaincy in prisons, where

there is also an institutional Christian bias, found nonreligious inmates are less likely to receive the pastoral help they need.

The number of nonreligious members of the Armed Forces is increasing rapidly. The privileged position of Christian chaplains in the army is clearly inappropriate and unsustainable.

Ruling: Collective worship and RE in NI schools breach human rights

In a recent response to repeated concerns raised by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the government said there are “no plans” to review laws requiring all state-funded schools to hold daily acts of invariably Christian worship. But a ground-breaking ruling in Northern Ireland may change everything.

In July the High Court of NI found the current arrangements for collective worship and religious education (RE) in NI breach human rights.

The case was brought in 2021 by a father and his seven year old daughter. They were granted leave to seek a judicial review of the arrangements after the girl’s family, who are non-religious, discovered her praying late into the night.

They were represented by human rights lawyer Darragh Mackin of Phoenix Law, who discussed the case at our NI conference in May.

The ruling found collective worship and RE breach an article in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) which requires the state to “respect the right of parents’ religious and philosophical convictions in respect of education and teaching”.

The court said the Department of Education and NI Assembly should act to ensure the arrangements for the teaching of RE and collective worship are compliant with the provisions of the ECHR.

What does this mean for the rest of the UK?

This ruling may have serious implications for schools in England, Scotland and Wales – particularly with regard to collective worship. RE in these three countries is somewhat more pluralistic than in NI, where it is controlled by religious bodies to a greater extent than anywhere else in the UK and



is heavily Christian-focused.

However, the law on collective worship in NI is very similar to those in England and Wales – where all schools are required to hold daily acts of worship and only parents, not children, have a right of withdrawal. This ruling therefore puts the legality of such laws in doubt.

■ Join the calls to end collective worship laws:

secularism.org.uk/end-compulsory-worship

Prioritise RE reform not enforcement, NSS tells government

Recent analysis by the RE Policy Unit, a collective of religious education bodies, found 34% of academies do not include RE on the school timetable. It also found 500 secondary schools are teaching zero hours of dedicated RE in Year 11.

In response, the Unit is calling for Ofsted to work with schools not currently teaching “sufficient” RE to “ensure they comply with the law”. It also said RE should receive greater funding in recognition of “parent and pupil support” for the subject.

But the stats do not indicate that support is there. A recent YouGov poll found 55% of Britons considered religious studies either not very or not at all important.

We therefore wrote to the minister of state for education in May saying the government should reform how religion and worldviews are taught, rather than use Ofsted to enforce an outdated model of RE that is no longer fit for purpose.

Schools Bill entrenches religious privilege in education

While the Schools Bill currently making its way through parliament will help tackle the scourge of unregistered faith schools in England, we are concerned it is being used to entrench religious privilege in education.

In addition to freshly legislating for collective worship and faith-based RE in academies, a provision in the bill will cement a “clearly defined role” for religious institutions in the running of schools with a religious character when they become academies.

But there are no plans for equivalent laws to protect the secular, community ethos of academies without a religious character. In fact, the government refused to support amendments which would help nonreligious academies protect their secular ethos.

This will leave non-religious schools vulnerable to the whims of religious multi-academy trusts and school leaders with religious agendas. We’ll continue to watch out for other attempts to embed religious privilege in the Schools Bill.

'De facto blasphemy laws' strike again

A cinema in Sheffield, June. An enormous crowd of Muslim men cluster around the entrance, baying for a movie to be cancelled.

At the doors, the manager, jostled by the crowd, shouts over a megaphone that the cinema "will not be showing this film again". The crowd roars in triumph.

This incident was filmed and circulated widely online. Similar scenes were repeated outside cinemas across the country. The movie that prompted the protests was *The Lady of Heaven*, which tells the story of the Islamic prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima from a Shia Muslim perspective. For the protestors, it was too blasphemous to bear.

One by one, cinemas cancelled all screenings of *The Lady of Heaven*. We got in touch with one chain, Cineworld, to ask exactly why they cancelled the movie. They told us: "Due to recent incidents related to screenings of *The Lady of Heaven*, we have made the decision to cancel upcoming screenings of the film nationwide to ensure the safety of our staff and customers."

We were swift in our condemnation of such pandering to fundamentalism. However, whilst it would be easy to accuse the cinemas of cowardice, we need to acknowledge that the threat of violent, even fatal, attacks in response to perceived insults to Islam is all too real.

Mere months later, author Salman Rushdie was brutally stabbed on stage in the US while giving a talk on free speech. The man charged with his attempted murder, Hadi Matar, accused him of 'attacking Islam' but admitted he'd never read *The Satanic Verses*, the supposedly blasphemous book that notoriously prompted a fatwa of murder against Rushdie. Indeed, being only 24, Matar wasn't even born when *The Satanic Verses* was published.

The very nearly successful attempt on Rushdie's life should be a wake-up call for liberal democracies around the world. Far from stopping them in their tracks, appeasing Islamists by censoring depictions of Islam they



Protestors call for the cancellation of *The Lady of Heaven*

object to merely emboldens them.

We will be lobbying all relevant authorities, calling on them to assure authors, artists, businesses and everyday citizens that their right to create or engage with material deemed offensive by religious fundamentalists will be protected and upheld. It is not only our lives, but the democratic foundations of free speech and free thought, which are at stake.

Human rights activist Pragna Patel, who defended Salman Rushdie in the wake of the fatwa, will be talking about her work challenging religious fundamentalism at our Bradlaugh Lecture on October 1st at Manchester Art Gallery. Find out more and book your place: secularism.org.uk/bradlaugh-lecture-2022

ISLAMIC 'BLASPHEMY' ATTACKS: A TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

1989: Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issues a fatwa ordering Salman Rushdie's execution following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. An attempt to assassinate Rushdie fails, but several people associated with the book are attacked and even killed in subsequent years.

2005: Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* publishes cartoons of Muhammad, leading to riots around the world in which over 200 people die.

2020: French teacher Samuel Paty is murdered for showing a cartoon of Muhammad in class.

2022: Salman Rushdie is seriously injured after an Islamist attack in the US.



2004: Dutch director Theo van Gogh is assassinated for a film about the treatment of women in Islam.

2011: The offices of French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris are petrol-bombed after they print a Muhammad cartoon on the magazine's cover. Terrorists go on to murder 12 at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in 2015.

2021: A teacher at Batley Grammar School in the UK is forced into hiding after showing a picture of Muhammad in class.

Theological colleges restrict academic freedom

We've raised concerns with the minister of state for higher and further education regarding the policies of some theological colleges registered with the Office for Students (OfS).

Registration with the OfS gives colleges access to public funds including student loans.

The OfS's conditions of registration state providers must allow staff and students to "question and test received wisdom" and "put forward new ideas and controversial and unpopular opinions".

But Moorlands College says teaching and research "shall be carried on in strict accordance with the doctrinal basis set out".

And Regents Theological College requires staff and students to adhere to the statement: "We believe the Bible, as originally given, to be without error".

Requiring academics to adhere to unquestionable statements of faith is incompatible with academic freedom and restricts their freedom of speech.

Success: 'Hate preacher' charity finally shut down

After years of campaigning from the NSS, an Islamic charity run by a notorious 'hate preacher' has finally been shut down.

The Charity Commission for England and Wales ordered Islamic Research Foundation International (IRFI) to be dissolved in May after an inquiry found it funded TV programmes which incited violence and murder via the 'Peace TV' network.

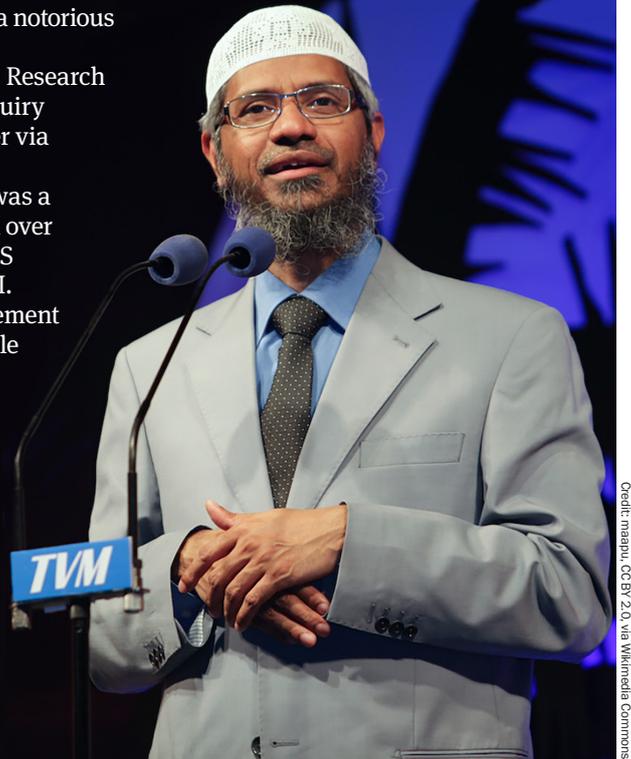
The former chair of IRFI's listed trustees, Zakir Naik (pictured), was a regular preacher on Peace TV. He has been banned entry to the UK over security concerns. He was disqualified as a trustee in 2019 after NSS quizzed the Charity Commission over Naik's involvement with IRFI.

IRFI was registered under the charitable purpose of 'the advancement of religion'. Unfortunately, this charitable purpose appears to enable some charities to promote harmful ideas with impunity.

In June we referred a Christian charity, East Kilbride Christadelphian Ecclesia, to Scotland's charity regulator OSCR after finding anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and viciously homophobic posts on the charity's Facebook page. OSCR said there was nothing it could do, because it concluded the views expressed by the charity are 'in accordance with their religious beliefs'.

This is one reason why we campaign for 'the advancement of religion' to be removed from the list of charitable purposes.

Find out more: secularism.org.uk/charities



Credit: maapu, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Defending women's rights

The overturning of *Roe v Wade*, which ended the constitutional right to an abortion in US, has sent shockwaves way beyond America. It has emboldened anti-choice activists around the globe, including in the UK.

But the foundations laid over the years by pro-choice campaigners are helping to safeguard women's reproductive rights in the UK. In July the government confirmed that as part of its women's health strategy, it would increase access and choice for all women who want contraception and ensure women can continue to access robust and high-quality abortion services. This was one of a number of concerns raised by the NSS in response to the government's consultation on the women's health strategy.

Meanwhile, we've responded to consultations on domestic abuse and violence against women held by the Scottish government and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). We warned the Scottish government on the dangers of using faith groups to deliver services for women experiencing violence, and welcomed the CPS's acknowledgement of the role religious courts can sometimes play in domestic abuse.

Protecting the rights of the child

■ A United Nations committee has called on Chile to investigate all cases of child abuse in the Catholic Church following an NSS intervention. In April we called on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to recommend an official inquiry into institutional responses to child abuse, as part of the committee's review of Chile's record on child rights.

■ The chair of our Secular Medical Forum Dr Antony Lempert has co-authored an article criticising "serious weaknesses" in British Medical Association guidance which permits religious and cultural circumcision on boys.

Campaigning for secular healthcare

■ We briefed all MPs prior to a parliamentary debate on assisted dying in July, prompted by a petition which gained over 155,000 signatures in support of legalising assisted dying. We asked MPs to help ensure religious teachings are not imposed on the majority who support a more compassionate assisted dying law in the UK. Most MPs who spoke supported reforming the law.

■ We've responded to consultations in England, Scotland and the United Nations on mental health, warning that religious imposition in healthcare, education and public services can be detrimental to mental health and wellbeing.

Human Rights Act protected – for now

We've welcomed the government's decision to shelve its plan to replace the Human Rights Act with a British 'Bill of Rights'.

We had argued that the government had failed to present a persuasive rationale for replacing the Human Rights Act.

In a letter to the Justice secretary in July, we raised concerns that the proposed legislation would unreasonably limit public access to

judicial review and weaken judges' interpretative powers. We warned that this could compel courts to interpret Convention rights in a narrow, static fashion which risks a rollback on rights protections, particularly for the nonreligious.

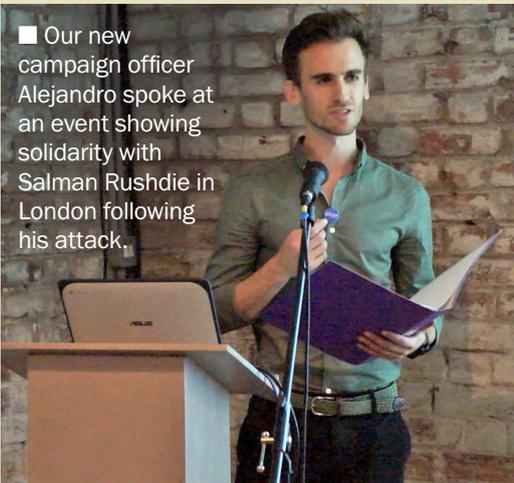
On her first day in office as prime minister Liz Truss pulled the bill of rights legislation, which is now expected to face a comprehensive rewrite.



NSS out and about

■ In August our head of operations Helen Nicholls chaired a panel on the consequences of leaving religion at the Celebrating Dissent conference in Cologne, Germany (pictured above). The NSS co-sponsored the event. It was the largest and most prominent gathering of ex-Muslims, freethinkers, and intellectuals championing freedom of thought since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and was organised by Freethought Lebanon and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.

■ Our new campaign officer Alejandro spoke at an event showing solidarity with Salman Rushdie in London following his attack.



■ And don't forget... on **October 1st** our **Bradlaugh Lecture 2022** will take place at **Manchester Art Gallery**. **Pragna Patel** will be speaking about her experiences as a **secularist and feminist campaigner**, including her activities during the **Rushdie Affair**. **Book your place:** secularism.org.uk/bradlaugh-lecture-2022

Welcome to our new campaign officers

We're delighted that Jack Rivington and Alejandro Sanchez have joined our team as campaign officers. Jack has an MA in Philosophy and Alejandro is a former NHS doctor. Welcome!



Jack Rivington



Alejandro Sanchez

AGM notice

Our 2022 AGM will be held on **Saturday 26 November** at **Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL**. This event is limited to members and representatives of affiliated groups. There will be online access available for members who are unable to attend in person. More details on the AGM and how to stand for Council or submit a motion have been sent to members alongside this Bulletin.

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