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[Ep 59: The advancement of religion](#)

Posted: Tue, 19th Oct 2021

Should organisations be entitled to tax breaks and other privileges solely on the basis that they 'advance religion'?

Under the Charities Act 2011, any organisation can register as a charity if one of its purposes – or even its only purpose – is '[the advancement of religion](#)'. But should this be enough to entitle an organisation to public funding, along with the reputational boost that comes from being a charity? What counts as a 'religion' anyway, and why does it exclude non-religious worldviews such as humanism? And what happens if the ideology espoused by that religion conflicts with widely shared values, or the law?

In this episode, [Emma Park](#) discusses these questions with [Megan Manson](#), Head of Policy and Research at the National Secular Society, and co-author of the 2019 report, [For the public benefit? The case for removing 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose](#).

Megan also gives an update on charities recently brought to light by the NSS whose only or main charitable purpose is the advancement of religion. Some of these have openly advocated unpalatable views, from [extremism and jihad](#) to [misogyny](#) to [gay conversion therapy](#).

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[Ep 56: The Assisted Dying Bill 2021](#)

Posted: Tue, 7th Sep 2021

The Assisted Dying Bill 2021 is likely to have its second reading this autumn. But how far should the law permit those who wish to die to be assisted by others in doing so?

In this episode, [Emma Park](#) speaks to two guests about the details of this [private member's bill](#), its history and underlying principles.

[Molly Meacher, Baroness Meacher](#), (02:13) is the promoter of the bill in the House of Lords and Chair of Dignity in Dying, a campaign group that supports AD for terminally ill patients with no more than six months to live. She discusses the key provisions of the bill and the rationale behind its numerous safeguards.

[A.C. Grayling](#) (19:24) is a philosopher, Master of the New College of the Humanities and a former Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck. In a [recent article](#) for *The Times*, he argued that the right to be given help to end one's life should potentially be extended far beyond the case of terminally ill patients. He explores the considerations for and against reforming the law, and argues that the right to die is derived from the principle of personal autonomy.

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Ep 55: Pastafarianism and the meaning of 'religion'

Posted: Tue, 24th Aug 2021

A spoof religion devised to mock creationism has attracted a global following. But what does 'religion' mean anyway?

In this episode, [Emma Park](#) speaks to three guests with different perspectives on [Pastafarianism](#) and the challenge that it poses to religious privilege.

[Derk Venema](#) (03:20) is an assistant professor in legal philosophy at the Open University of the Netherlands. He was the legal counsel for two Pastafarians who featured in the 2020 documentary *I, Pastafari*. Derk talks about [their court cases](#), the difficulties of letting the state decide what counts as a religion, and the requirement that a religious belief should be 'serious'.

[Captain Tanya Watkins](#) (28:35) is the self-appointed leader of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in Australia. She discusses her failed attempts to have her [church legally incorporated](#), as recognised religions can do, and explains why Pastafarianism is really about being nice to people – and eating pasta.

[Dr Tony Meacham](#) (43:17) is a law lecturer at Coventry University. He considers the challenge which movements like [Pastafarianism pose](#) to traditional definitions of 'religion', and the place of religion in English law.

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Ep 54: The Catholic Church and Canada's residential schools

Posted: Tue, 20th Jul 2021

"Not one single residential school was ever built with a playground. But every single residential school had ample space for a cemetery."

Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School in Lebreton, Saskatchewan, was one of the first such schools established by the Canadian government in the 19th century. From the beginning, it was run by the Catholic Church, which was actively involved in the forced removal of indigenous children from their families, in attempts to erase their links to their culture, and in training them up as cheap labour for colonial businesses.

In this episode, [Emma Park](#) is joined by the Canadian journalist [Kerry Benjoe](#). Kerry was the first indigenous person to work for the Regina Leader-Post, her city's daily newspaper, and is now Indigenous Storyteller for CBC Saskatchewan. She attended Lebreton from the age of 15 to 18, at a time when it had been taken over from the Church by the Star Blanket Cree Nation. She was in the fourth and final generation in her family to do so.

As a journalist, Kerry has spent years gathering stories, often harrowing, from the survivors of the residential schools. She shares some of these stories on the podcast, from humiliation and physical abuse to the loss of childhood. She explains why the [recent discovery of graves at Kamloops](#) residential school, also run by the Catholic Church, came as no surprise to the local indigenous community.

Please note that this episode contains distressing material.

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Notes

- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)
- [First Nation announces discovery of 751 unmarked graves near former residential school](#)
- [Amid shameful residential-school revelations, I cannot remain a Catholic](#)
- [Protest the Pope Campaign uses films to explore its objections to the Pope's visit](#)

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Ep 48: Challenging the Jehovah's Witnesses

Posted: Thu, 29th Apr 2021

Lloyd Evans was an elder in the Jehovah's Witnesses, before he left the organisation in 2013. He has since been campaigning to expose its workings to the public.

In this episode, Lloyd speaks to Emma Park about the JW's history and key beliefs, including their doctrine of refusing blood transfusions, and the practice of 'shunning' people who decide to renounce their religion. He discusses the ways in which the organisation is structured so as to facilitate the concealment of child abuse from external investigation.

Lloyd also argues that there is a pervasive deference to religion, both within the NHS and in British society more generally, that prevents the harm that can be caused by organisations like the JW's from being properly challenged.

Emma is then joined by the NSS's Megan Manson to reflect further on the JW's influence over NHS policy through their 'hospital liaison committees'. The JW's arguably illustrate the problems with allowing 'the advancement of religion' to qualify an institution as a charity.

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Notes

- [NHS trusts' cosy relationships with Jehovah's Witness leaders could have tragic consequences](#)
- [Religious fundamentalists can't be trusted with child protection](#)
- [Frank Cranmer, 'Vicarious liability for rape: Barry Congregation of JW's'](#)
- [The Lloyd Evans Channel – ex-JW on YouTube](#)
- [Ian McEwan's *The Children Act*, reviewed by Emma Park](#)

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[Any serious counter-extremism strategy should consider religious charities – Opinion Out Loud Ep 05](#)

Posted: Tue, 6th Apr 2021

As a commission calls for action to tackle hateful extremism, Megan Manson says changes in the charity sector – including legal reform – would be both helpful and compatible with fundamental liberal principles.

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