

Bulletin

national
secular
society

Issue 78 Summer 2021

challenging religious privilege



Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

THE BATLEY GRAMMAR SAGA AND THE SURRENDER OF LIBERAL PRINCIPLES

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The Batley affair shows the need to stand up to fundamentalist demands

Recent events at a grammar school in Batley, West Yorkshire are another warning sign that liberal secular principles are in retreat.

A teacher who used a Muhammad cartoon in a lesson about freedom of expression was suspended after protesters turned up outside the school gates claiming offence and demanding action.

The outcome of a subsequent investigation was that the cartoon shouldn't be shown. This was a victory for the religious bullies and essentially a capitulation to the mob. It sets a terrible precedent, and will only further embolden those who wish to intimidate society into submission.

The investigation did at least clear the teacher of the wild accusations of 'stirring up hatred' levelled against him by the protesters. Given how the spread of false claims led to the murder of Samuel Paty in France last year, after he similarly used cartoons of

Muhammad in class, those accusations were reckless.

Too often, perhaps particularly in a country so steeped in religious privilege, the temptation is to sacrifice liberal principles for the sake of expediency and a quiet life. But accommodations to fundamentalist religion will bring anything but a quiet

“Accommodations to fundamentalist religion will bring anything but a quiet life. They will only encourage further demands, to the detriment of liberalism, individual rights and social cohesion.”

life. They will only encourage further demands, to the detriment of liberalism, individual rights and social cohesion.

Around the same time the protests erupted in Batley, the NSS hosted the launch of a new book to celebrate the radical life of George Jacob Holyoake. Along with NSS founder Charles Bradlaugh, Holyoake was instrumental in popularising and promoting

secularist principles of separation of church and state, freethought, free expression, and freedom of and from religion.

The work pioneered by Bradlaugh, Holyoake and others like them to ensure people's lives are not restricted or unduly burdened by religion continues to be relevant today.

Significant progress has been made in the fight for democratic principles and basic human rights. But with religious fundamentalism on the rise, the drift away from the ideals of liberal democracy is alarming. That's why the work of the NSS remains so necessary.

In this edition you'll read how we remain at the forefront of the fight for a secular liberal democracy. From free speech to faith schools, we're working to ensure that religion isn't able to impose its dogma on those who don't share it. And your support is vital to our efforts.

Challenging church control of universities

Fifteen universities in the UK are managed and governed by churches. To all intents and purposes these are faith universities.

Their activities and status have changed significantly since they began as teacher training colleges in the 19th century. But they remain tightly controlled by churches.

Faith universities' governing bodies include religious appointments – who almost always have a built-in majority. Gaps in equality law allow these universities to discriminate in the appointment of staff – up to and

including the role of vice-chancellor.

The chair of our Secular Education Forum, Keith Sharpe, recently highlighted this in a piece for *Times Higher Education* (pictured).

Keith argued that the religious privilege embedded in faith universities enables discrimination and creates tension between universities' academic purpose and the interests of those who control them.

And he warned that the Church of England appears keen to take the universities it controls in a regressive direction.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH UNIVERSITIES

University of Chester

- Council membership must have majority of 'foundation members' – practising members of a church
- Majority of foundation members must be "communicant members of the C of E"

St Mary's University, Twickenham

- Archbishop of Westminster & Catholic Education Service nominate majority of governors
- Articles of association say its purpose is "to advance education in such a manner as befits a Catholic foundation"

Faith universities are an anachronism

Churches' grip on former religious teacher training colleges is incompatible with their remit as publicly funded universities, says Keith Sharpe

Research shows overwhelming case against faith schools...

We've published a substantial new analysis of academic research which shows the overwhelming nature of the evidence against state-funded faith schools.

Our Faith Schools Research Bank brings together evidence from almost 200 sources on the impact of faith schools.

It outlines evidence in five key areas: social cohesion; performance and selection; choice and admissions; values and morality; and opinion polls.

We launched the bank in February and held an online launch event a few weeks later.

Supporters of faith schools commonly claim that they provide a social benefit, improved choice, and a superior moral foundation. As the bank shows, these claims and more are ground down under the weight of evidence.

We'll continue to campaign for a secular and inclusive education system to improve social cohesion and enable children to develop their own religious beliefs.



WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

- Segregating children fosters exclusivity, insularity & social division
- Faith schools don't produce better grades once factors other than faith 'ethos' are accounted for
- Faith schools undermine parental choice for many families
- Religious values often clash with the promotion of equality
- There's strong public opposition to the idea of state-funded faith schools



"The evidence shows that faith schools advance the interests of religious institutions, rather than society as a whole. Faith schools foster social division, undermine equality and infringe pupils' intellectual autonomy. And the arguments made in their favour don't stand up to scrutiny."

Steven Kettell, University of Warwick academic and co-author of the bank (pictured, at our launch event)

...But NSS still has to resist plans for new faith schools

We're continuing to push back against plans to open several new state-funded faith schools.

Four new Church of England faith schools have moved closer to opening in recent months, despite a lack of public scrutiny around them.

In **Kingston-upon-Thames**, the Department for Education has approved funding in principle for a voluntary aided C of E school.

VA faith schools can enforce a particularly exclusive religious ethos.

This school is due to discriminate on religious grounds in a third of admissions if it's oversubscribed, and

in future that proportion could rise.

In principle, VA schools can apply a religious test for up to 100% of places.

The local council recently launched an overdue consultation on the plans – and we responded to say it should pursue inclusive, secular alternatives.

A new C of E faith school has

moved to the pre-opening stage in **Wingerworth in Derbyshire** as part of the government's free school programme.

In the latest wave of free school proposals, the government has also approved funding for C of E schools in **Hartlepool** and at the new housing estate of Conningbrook Park, near Ashford in **Kent**.

Many local residents are likely to have little choice but to attend the Conningbrook Park faith school. And the site of the school will be provided by the housing developer, passing the associated costs onto residents.



Collective worship: don't enforce the law – repeal it

We urged the government to repeal the law requiring collective worship in schools in England after a minister said it would “investigate” schools which breached it.

We wrote to Nick Gibb to ask him to clarify the comments, which he made in parliament – and to repeal the law.

We said all aspects of school life, including assemblies, should be “respectful and equally inclusive of all pupils, irrespective of their religion or belief background”.

We added that the law – which is widely disregarded, particularly in non-faith schools – was anachronistic amid rising levels of non-belief and religious diversity in Britain.

Meanwhile, a new private member’s bill introduced by Liberal Democrat peer Lorely Burt is seeking to replace worship in non-faith schools with

assemblies which are inclusive of pupils regardless of religion or belief. The bill is set to be debated later this year.

UN questions the law

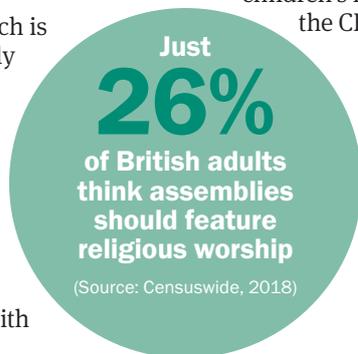
The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has also questioned whether laws requiring worship in schools within the UK were compatible with human rights – after we raised the issue in a submission.

As part of its periodic examination of children’s human rights, the CRC also asked what

measures the UK was taking to protect children’s rights on a range of other issues we’d raised.

These included providing adequate access to comprehensive relationships and sex education, and safe abortion services in Northern Ireland.

The committee also raised the issue of FGM and unnecessary treatment on intersex children – but did not raise the issue of non-therapeutic circumcision of boys, despite our urging it to scrutinise policy in this area.



“If the department is informed that a school may be in breach of this requirement, it will be investigated. Where needed, the department will remind schools of their duty on this matter and advise on how this can be met.”

Schools minister Nick Gibb speaking in parliament

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP: THE LAW EXPLAINED

- All schools in England & Wales are legally required to hold daily acts of worship
- Worship should be “wholly or mainly of a Christian character”
- Guidance says worship “should be concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power”
- There are similar laws across the UK



Image by Jaime Weibel from Pixabay

Religious censorship of RSE has serious consequences

Secondary school pupils should be taught that they can choose “who to marry, when to marry and whether to marry at all”.

That’s the message from Nahamu, a Jewish counter-extremism group which has argued that a lack of relationships and sex education (RSE) is contributing to forced marriage in Charedi Jewish communities.

A Nahamu position paper on forced marriage, published in February, warned that some Charedi arranged marriages fall within the definition of forced marriage under UK law.

It also raised concerns about the consequences of many Charedi schools’

censorship of material that doesn’t match their worldview – and refusal to teach RSE.

A few weeks later came an eye-opening example of a school which is failing to give its pupils the education they need.

An inspection report revealed that every child had been withdrawn from sex education at Ateres Girls High School, an independent Orthodox Jewish school in Gateshead.

We raised the case with the Department for Education and urged ministers to reconsider the parental opt-out from sex education.

All pupils should have the same

entitlement to an education that provides vital information on issues that impact so greatly on their health and wellbeing.



Listen to NSS podcast episode 46: Forced marriage and the importance of RSE, with Eve Sacks



Scrap religious school inspections

We called for the scrapping of publicly-funded inspections of state schools which are carried out by religious groups.

Our report, *Religiosity inspections: the case against faith-based reviews of state schools*, says the inspections give religious groups undue influence over children's education.

Our findings were reported in *iNews* in April and the subject of a parliamentary question in June.

The inspections are designed to ensure that schools' religious education, denominational worship and overall environment promote a rigorous and specific faith ethos.

They are legally required under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005, in England, and Section 50 of the act in Wales.

Britain is becoming more non-religious and more religiously diverse. It needs secular schools that teach children of all faith and belief backgrounds together and enable children to make up their own minds about their beliefs.

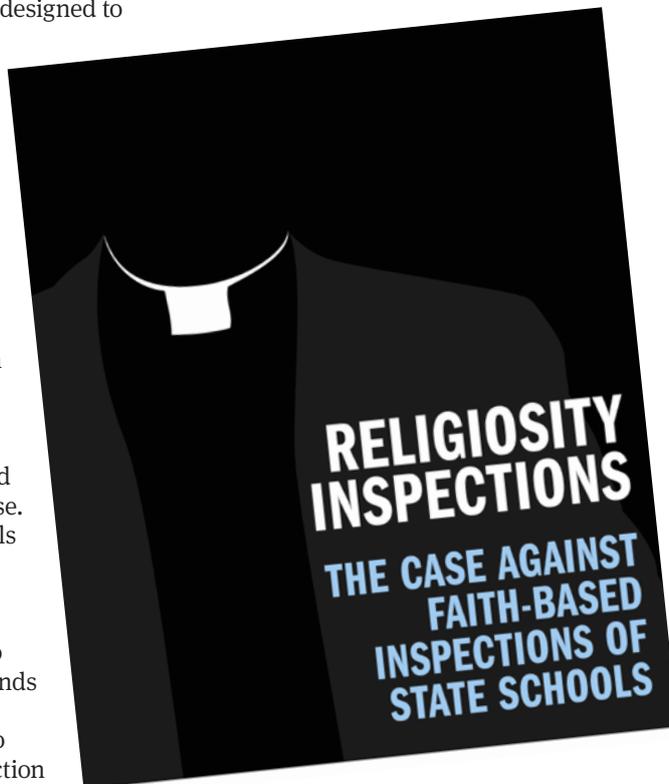
And if we're going to cut the archaic connection between religion and state

education, bringing an end to religion's role in inspecting schools would be a good place to start.

Key criticisms

The report draws on evidence from case studies and qualitative and quantitative analysis of inspection reports.

It says faith bodies use the inspections to promote their own interests and exert influence over the way education is provided.



WHAT HEAD TEACHERS SAY:

"These inspections are designed to find to what degree the schools' church status is embedded in school life and to what extent the school is 'selling' the C of E message... a dreadful waste of time and resources."

John, the former head of a C of E school in Nottinghamshire

"I felt I was collaborating in a system where thousands of children were being influenced by a powerful organisation. But while [church-led] inspections are still happening, headteachers will continue to play the game, as they feel their careers are dependent on a positive outcome. And the church's sway over schools and their children's learning will remain."

Matthew, the former head of a C of E school on the south coast

THE CASE AGAINST RELIGIOSITY INSPECTIONS

VALUES

- Reports tend to frame widely held values as uniquely or fundamentally Christian
- Most urge schools to be more explicit about this

PROMOTION OF RELIGION

- Reports tend to conflate successful RE with the promotion of Christian viewpoints

COST

- Inspections cost £760,000 a year on average

WORKLOAD

- They create additional standards and stress for teachers

It adds that the inspections help to enforce a different set of standards and educational aims in faith schools.

Recommendations

The report recommends the repeal of Sections 48 and 50 of the Education Act, to end the inappropriate inspection regime.

It also says:

- Public funding of faith-based inspections should end.
- The government should issue guidance on third party inspections of state schools.
- Inspections by the school watchdogs, Ofsted and Estyn, should be extended to cover religious education in all schools.
- Ofsted and Estyn inspections should be strengthened to ensure all schools are promoting an appropriate and inclusive ethos.

Listen to NSS podcast episode 50: The Church of England's influence over education, with Chris Selway & Matthew Hill



THE BATLEY GRAMMAR SAGA



BATLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL
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A co-educational Free School for pupils

www.batleygrammar.co.uk

Batley Grammar School: Staff member suspended as parents protest use of Prophet Mohammed caricature

THE SPARK:

Teacher hounded over Muhammad cartoon

In March a teacher was suspended after using a cartoon of Islam's prophet Muhammad in a religious studies lesson about blasphemy - as protesters gathered outside his school demanding his dismissal.

Batley Grammar School, in West Yorkshire, responded to the outrage by issuing an "unequivocal" apology for the use of the resource.

It also withdrew teaching on the relevant part of the course and pledged to review its RS curriculum "to ensure no other resource or statement is inappropriate".

As various public figures wrung their hands over the fact the cartoon had been shown, the teacher faced threats and was driven into hiding.

Soon afterwards the school also

suspended two other teachers.

The story prompted a substantial amount of press coverage.

We criticised the protests and the school's response in various reports, and warned that the episode threatened to place an unreasonable restriction on teachers' freedom to explore sensitive subjects and enable students to think critically about them.

"The school unequivocally apologises for using a totally inappropriate resource in a recent religious studies lesson... The school is working closely with the governing board and community leaders to help resolve this situation."

Batley Grammar School's statement as protests broke out

"The school has thrown my son under a bus."

The teacher's father

THE FALLOUT:

Unsatisfactory local investigation as government fails to lead

After the suspensions were imposed, the trust behind the school launched an independent investigation into the events around it.

The trust said the investigation would “examine how certain materials, which caused offence, came to be used”.

This suggested a local investigation would have the wrong focus, and miss key questions about the way the affair had been handled.

And as we grew increasingly unconvinced by the responses we got from the Department for Education on the issue, our CEO spoke out in *The Telegraph* (pictured).

He warned that, by leaving the fallout to be handled at a local level, the government was ceding too much

power to outraged Muslim ‘community leaders’.

Investigation outcome imposes blasphemy code

In May the local investigation drew to a close.

The suspensions of the teachers affected were rightly lifted – although the father of the teacher at the centre of the row said he was unlikely to return to the school.

And alarmingly, an executive summary of the investigation also said it was “not necessary” to use the image, “or any such images of the type used”, in any lessons.

This imposes a de facto blasphemy code on the school.

Weak government response

When the story first broke the Department for Education had said it was “never acceptable to threaten or intimidate teachers”, and schools were “free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their curriculum”.

But when the local investigation wrapped up, the DfE’s response was far weaker.

The department merely said “parents, families and the local community” should “recognise the findings of the investigation” and “welcome and support” the trust’s plan to “strengthen its oversight of the curriculum”.

“We are concerned that the Department for Education doesn’t seem interested enough given that the outcome of this will have national implications. They have washed their hands of it.”

THE CONTEXT:

Liberal principles at stake

The Batley affair has set an alarming precedent for teachers across the country.

The outcome of the local investigation sends a message that censorship can be imposed through mob rule.

It sets a deeply censorious precedent that could have implications for the freedom to teach on any number of contentious topics.

And it follows several similar events in recent years.

In 2018 a primary school in east London was effectively forced to back

down after adopting a policy that girls under the age of eight shouldn’t wear hijabs in school and young children shouldn’t fast during Ramadan.

The DfE was also slow to respond when Muslim-led protesters objected to teaching about same-sex relationships and caused substantial disruption for primary schools in Birmingham in 2019.

And when it issued guidance on relationships and sex education that year, it required schools to “take children’s religious background into account” in their teaching.

NSS defends key principles

Throughout the Batley affair we’ve been pushing the government to do more to uphold the fundamental principles at stake.

And we’re continuing to push the government to take the lead on this issue, and to show the necessary leadership when religious hardliners try to impose their agendas on schools.

Teachers must be able to explore challenging issues in the classroom and shouldn’t face a religious veto on which resources they can use.

More reaction from our website

“At first it was a publication’s act of satirising Islam that translated into asking to be murdered. Now it’s teachers showing those cartoons in lessons on blasphemy that is translating into ‘asking for it’. Next it may well be critics of this blatant endorsement of Islamic blasphemy laws in the West who might ‘ask for it’.”

Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, writer, in a guest blog



“There is nothing new about cartoons being used as a device to poke fun at the religious... Freedom of speech must entail a right to offend.”

Bob Forder, NSS council member and historian, puts the row in historical context



NSS PODCAST:

Episode 47–
The Batley
Grammar case,
with Fiyaz Mughal &
Khadija Khan

Episode 51 – Laïcité
and free speech in
France, with Caroline
Fourest



Major reform of teaching on religion in Wales

In March legislation which will substantially reform the teaching of religion and belief – including by requiring secularism to be taught as a key concept – passed its final vote in Wales.

The legislation will allow the introduction of a new skills-based curriculum in all schools.

We strongly lobbied ministers in Wales over curricular reform for several years, and the bill introduces some hard-won and significant changes.

It will introduce a more objective way of learning about religion and

“This landmark piece of legislation will give pupils across Wales access to a more objective way of learning about religion and belief.

“But government concessions will mean religious groups’ interests continue to enjoy a privileged input into this subject area – and to shape the way it’s taught in many faith schools.”

Our head of education Alastair Lichten responds to the passage of the bill

belief, through the new subject of RVE (religion, values and ethics), which replaces RE.

All children will have access to a more pluralistic and objective RVE curriculum. Faith schools will be required to offer it – but only as an

option alongside faith-based RVE, meaning it risks being undervalued.

We’re also concerned that the bill will end parents’ right to withdraw children from RVE prematurely. This could lead to legal challenges where the subject is insufficiently pluralistic and objective.

The new legislation also makes relationships and sex education statutory. But again this comes with unhelpful concessions to faith schools, which will continue to be allowed to teach the subject from a religious perspective.

Ministers will consult on relevant guidance in the autumn and the curriculum is due to come into force in September 2022. We’ll continue engaging with this process.

WALES’S NEW EDUCATION BILL:

- ✓ Replaces RE with religion, values and ethics
- ✓ Requires relationships & sex ed in all schools
- ✓ Puts secularism on the curriculum
- ✓ Requires coverage of non-religious worldviews
- ✗ Lets faith schools keep teaching faith-based RVE & RSE
- ✗ Ends parents’ right to withdraw from RVE prematurely
- ✗ Leaves RVE in the hands of religiously-dominated local bodies
- ✗ Doesn’t end collective worship

Education in NI: a golden opportunity for meaningful change

In March there was much to celebrate at Seaview Primary School in Glenarm, in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland executive approved a plan for it to become an integrated school – meaning it will serve children from all religion and belief backgrounds equally.

This was the first time a Catholic school had been approved for integration in NI, where more than nine in 10 children attend religiously segregated schools.

Soon afterwards NI’s Department of Education approved plans for two more schools – both controlled schools, which tend to serve children from Protestant backgrounds – to integrate.

But at the same time applications to integrate two more Catholic schools were rejected.

The successful integration campaigns are very welcome news. But as it

stands reforms to NI’s education system are frustratingly piecemeal and inconsistent.

And recent riots in several towns and cities across NI have highlighted the urgent need to bring people from different communities together.

But religious sectoral bodies currently wield great power over education in Northern Ireland. They control governing bodies and curricula, and act as a barrier to needed reform.

Major review launched

Now a major review of education has been launched in NI – providing a great chance for politicians to introduce substantial change and address deep divisions along religious lines.

We’ll make a series of recommendations to the review which would roll back religious control of schools and prioritise social cohesion,



integration and inclusion.

Meanwhile a bill in the NI assembly would end a legal exemption allowing religious discrimination against teachers.

We’re backing the bill – and calling on the review to recommend the same change.

Ireland's mother and baby home scandal and the necessity of secularism

In 1943, three out of four children born in a mother and baby home in Bessborough – a suburb of Cork, in the south-west of Ireland – died within the first year of their lives.

They were among the 9,000 children who died in Ireland's mother and baby homes, which were largely run by churches – particularly the Catholic Church.

Approximately 15% of the children in these institutions, which were set up for unmarried mothers and their children, died between the 1920s and the 1990s.

Another home run by a group of Catholic nuns, Bon Secours in Tuam,

“We were told we were fallen women, bad girls, we had to pay for our sins.”

Adele, who was sent to a mother and baby home run by a Catholic order after becoming pregnant at the age of 17

became notorious worldwide after hundreds of babies and children were buried inappropriately in its grounds without even being recorded.

Now a report has drawn renewed attention to the grotesque level of infant mortality and the cruel treatment of women and children who went to these homes.

Lack of church-state separation a key factor

The Irish state's deferential relationship with religion, and particularly the Catholic Church, was a major reason for the misery in the homes.

The state entrusted the care of vulnerable women and children to church orders and failed to hold them to account for their abusive practices.

Meanwhile the church's contempt for unmarried mothers and its teachings on sex and birth control helped to drive public policy and social attitudes in a deeply regressive direction.

Ireland has shown several promising signs of secularisation in recent years.

“The church behaved like a department of the state; it sometimes even looked to be the other way around.”

Our president Keith Porteous Wood reflects on the scandal

But even now there are significant questions over whether the country is prepared to learn the right lessons from the scandal. Some survivors' groups branded the report a “whitewash”, as it failed to hold either church or state suitably accountable.

We must hope Ireland resolves to do better. And the world should note the damage that can be done when states leave religious authority unchecked.



View of the mass grave at the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, Tuam

Standing up for women's health

We urged the government to ensure women's health is prioritised over religious concerns in response to a consultation.

In response to a call for evidence on a proposed strategy for women's health in England, we warned that women in religious communities often face significant barriers to information and education that may be relevant to their health.

We added that the government should seek to protect women's individual rights, and shouldn't necessarily accept that community and religious leaders speak on behalf of women within their communities on relevant issues.

SOME KEY POINTS WE CALLED FOR:

- Stronger action against misogynistic charities
- Protection of access to abortion & birth control
- No religious obstructions to education about relationships & sexual health

Abortion and the pandemic

We called for measures allowing women to have early medical abortions at home during the coronavirus pandemic to be made permanent across Britain.

We made the calls in response to consultations on the future of policy in England, Wales and Scotland.

We also added our names to an open letter to health ministers, coordinated by BPAS, which makes a similar call.

And meanwhile we responded to a consultation on whether to allow the supply of the ‘mini-pill’ in pharmacies.

We said this measure would make it easier for women and girls from religious communities which disapprove of contraception to access it. And we said the health and wellbeing of patients should be ministers' primary consideration.

Holding harmful religious charities to account

There have been developments on several fronts as we continue to work to hold religious charities to account when they cause harm.

Muslim charity promoting homophobia & misogyny

In January we asked the Charity Commission for England and Wales why it had waved through the registration of the Ghamidi Centre of Islamic Communication.

The charity was carrying deeply homophobic and misogynistic lectures on its website.

A lecture entitled “Is there room for gays and lesbian (sic) in Islam?” argued that homosexuality “needs to be stopped” and “needs to be curbed”. Among its bizarre ranting came an

apparent claim that same-sex attraction is “a disease” that “needs to be cured”.

Another said it was acceptable for a husband to “punish” his wife if she challenges his authority, provided it does not “leave any sign of wound” on her.

‘Plague protection kits’ row

In February the commission appointed an interim manager to The Kingdom Church GB – a charity in south London whose bishop had sold ‘plague protection kits’ during the early stages of the pandemic.

We’d raised the issue with the commission back in April 2020.

The commission opened an inquiry in August, as we mentioned in the spring Bulletin.

It’s now said it has “serious ongoing concerns” about the charity’s administration, and the interim manager will “consider the charity’s future operation and viability”.

Meanwhile we also urged the commission to look into the relationship between the charity Christ Embassy and the TV channel Loveworld. Loveworld has repeatedly broadcast misleading statements about the Covid pandemic.

Regulator fails to act over ‘conversion therapy’

But in Northern Ireland, the Charity Commission for NI failed to act against Core Issues Trust – a charity promoting “change orientated therapy” for people “seeking to leave homosexual behaviours and feelings”.

In a weak response to concerns we’d raised, the commission said it wasn’t its “role” to “adopt a position on the charity’s conduct in this matter”.

It also noted that the trust presents its therapy as “beneficial” and “contests the view that this practice is inherently harmful”.

“The Charity Commission should quickly review the status of the Ghamidi Centre and consider whether the material on its website is compatible with the expectation that charities provide a public benefit.

“And this should prompt questions over the status of ‘the advancement of religion’ as a charitable purpose in law.”

Our head of policy and research Megan Manson, quoted in *Pink News*

Standing up for free speech

Scotland’s censorious hate crime bill – which we’ve highlighted in several recent Bulletins – passed its final vote in March.

The bill will introduce offences of ‘stirring up hatred’ on various grounds, including religion.

Scots could be subject to prosecution if their behaviour is deemed “threatening or abusive” and intended to stir up hatred.

Our lobbying helped to secure several key amendments which will go a long way to protecting free speech on religion.

But we remain concerned that the bill will chill freedom of expression, and the threshold for prosecution is lower than that for similar offences in England and Wales.

The bill has also repealed Scotland’s formal blasphemy law. We’ve also

now called for the repeal of Northern Ireland’s blasphemy laws, which remain the only formal blasphemy laws in the UK.

Video sharing rules

Elsewhere we warned that proposed rules from the communications regulator Ofcom, which would protect users from material “likely to incite hatred” on video sharing platforms, risk unduly encroaching on freedom of expression.

We warned that Ofcom’s definition of “likely to incite hatred” was too vague

and the rules would encourage providers to err on the side of censorship.

Drive for ‘religious literacy’ in the press

We also warned that a parliamentary group’s report which aims to promote ‘religious literacy’ in the press poses a threat to freedom of expression.

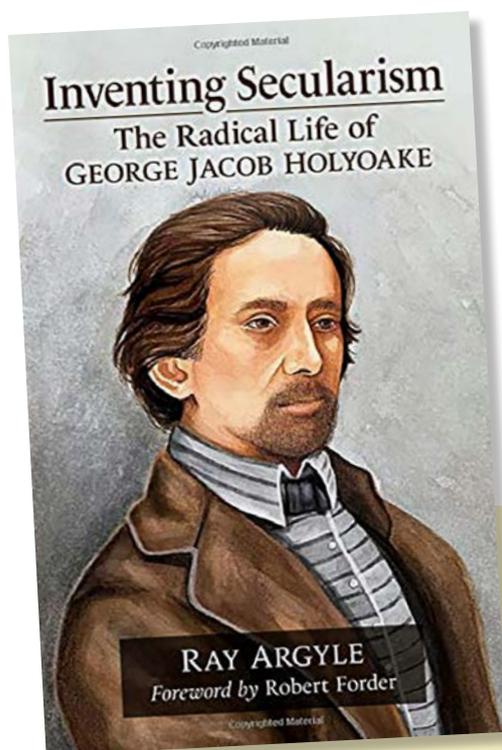
The report, from the all-party parliamentary group on religion in the media, includes a call for tighter press regulation and echoes calls for the press regulator Ipso to protect groups – rather than just individuals – from discrimination.



KEY AMENDMENTS IN FINAL SCOTTISH HATE CRIME BILL:

- Protection for expressions of “antipathy, dislike, ridicule or insult towards” religion
- Behaviour must pass a “reasonable person” test to be judged “abusive”
- Prosecution must demonstrate intent to secure conviction

NSS hosts book launch for Holyoake biography



We hosted an online launch for Ray Argyle's book *Inventing Secularism: the radical life of George Jacob Holyoake*.

The book is the first modern biography of Holyoake, the 19th-century radical who's credited with coining the term 'secularism'.

The event saw Ray enter into a wide-ranging conversation with our podcast producer Emma Park, and read from a section of his book.

It's now available to watch on our YouTube channel.



Ray Argyle



Emma Park

WIN A COPY OF THE BOOK

You can win a copy of *Inventing Secularism* by Ray Argyle by entering our competition. Simply send in an answer to the following question:

George Holyoake spent six months in prison for blasphemy. Which jail was he imprisoned in?

Email your answers to admin@secularism.org.uk. Closing date: Friday 23 July.

NEWS IN NUMBERS

53%

of Britons said the Lords should not continue to have places for C of E bishops

Just

16%

said it should

66,438

the number of shekels (almost £15,000) which easyJet agreed to pay to a woman who was asked to move seats on a flight, to accommodate the wishes of ultra-Orthodox Jewish men

79%

of Britons said being a Christian is not important for "being truly British"

(Sources for polling data: YouGov on bishops; Gallup on being a Christian)

CAMPAIGNING IN BRIEF

■ We responded to a Law Commission consultation on proposals for comprehensive reforms to wedding law, and welcomed several steps which we've lobbied for. There were more details on the proposals in the autumn 2020 Bulletin.

■ We again urged the Nigerian authorities to release Mubarak Bala (pictured), a Humanist leader who has been in arbitrary detention for a year after being accused of insulting Islam's prophet Muhammad.



■ We joined the UK Freedom of Religion or Belief Forum, which brings together civil society groups, faith or belief organisations, and human rights NGOs to advance the cause of freedom of religion or belief around the world.

Help to restore Charles Bradlaugh's grave

We've launched a fundraiser to restore the grave of our founder, Charles Bradlaugh, which has fallen into disrepair in recent decades.

Bradlaugh was a 19th century political activist who argued for the abolition of the blasphemy law and the disestablishment of the Church of England.

A monument which was erected over his grave incorporated a substantial bronze bust – but this has since been vandalised and the bust stolen. It hasn't been replaced.

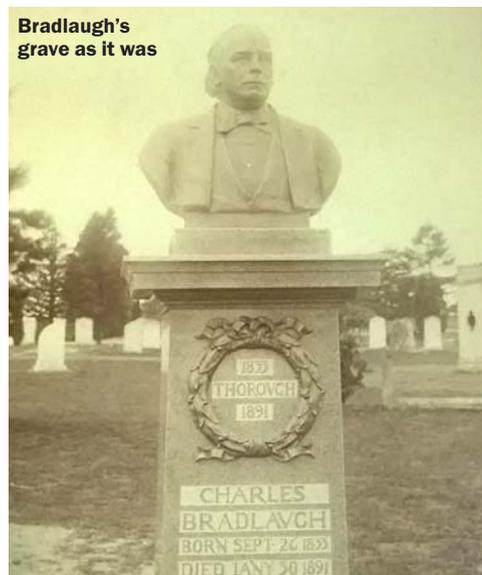
We're working with Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey to restore the grave, and we've commissioned the manufacture of a new replica bust.

An information panel with details of Bradlaugh's life will also feature as part of the project.

Find out more and contribute to the fundraiser by going to secularism.org.uk/bradlaugh-appeal.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, 1833–1891

- Founded the NSS
- Was repeatedly elected to parliament, but faced a long struggle to take his seat
- Effectively secured MPs' right to take a secular affirmation
- Was prosecuted for publishing information about birth control



From our latest podcast episodes

"Can we continue to have a philosophical and satirical newspaper in western secular democracy, or can we not? If we cannot continue to inform and sometimes to laugh about what scares us, then we are lost."

Caroline Fourest, former *Charlie Hebdo* journalist, on episode 51



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"Everyone has the human right of freedom of worship, but that human right includes freedom to leave one's religion if one wishes. So if you have an organisation that is exporting punishment on people who do leave, there's a violation there of human rights."

Lloyd Evans, ex-Jehovah's Witness campaigner, on episode 48



Listen at secularism.org.uk/podcast



Bradlaugh Lecture with Nazir Afzal

We're delighted to announce that Nazir Afzal will deliver our 2021 Bradlaugh Lecture on **Saturday 4 September**.

We plan to host this at **Manchester Art Gallery at 2pm**.

Nazir is the former chief prosecutor for the north west of England, and in this role he was in charge of prosecuting the Rochdale grooming gang. He was also recently appointed as the head of the Catholic Church's safeguarding body in England and Wales.

His lecture, entitled 'Blind spots', will explore how turning a blind eye has led to criminality and allowed harmful cultural practices to continue with impunity.

Our annual Bradlaugh Lecture gives a distinguished speaker an opportunity to explore a topic of interest to secularists in depth.

Go to secularism.org.uk/blind-spots to book your ticket.

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