

# Bulletin

 National  
**Secular**  
Society  
challenging religious privilege

Issue 85

Summer 2023

# SEALED WITH A KISS



**King Charles vows to uphold  
Church privileges at coronation**

**ALSO IN THIS  
EDITION:**

Anglicans and  
atheists unite at  
NSS event

UN tells UK:  
end religious  
discrimination in  
schools

Nicky Campbell to  
deliver Bradlaugh  
Lecture



From the CEO: Stephen Evans

# Building momentum to end religious privilege



The coronation in May was a stark reminder of the religious privilege entrenched in the UK's political and public life. Amid all the pomp and pageantry, the state occasion at Westminster Abbey was carefully choreographed to assert the Church of England's supremacy over the constitution, the monarchy, the state and its citizens.

The coronation of King Charles should be the last. The CofE's status as the national church is the ultimate religious privilege from which all other privileges flow. It's increasingly incongruous with the secular country we've become. The Church's dwindling congregations, its homophobic doctrine and failures over child sexual abuse make it more of a national embarrassment than a national treasure.

In recent months we've been leading the calls for reform. We've begun bringing together campaigners, commentators, theologians and parliamentarians to build the

momentum necessary to end religious privilege.

This means disestablishing the Church of England and ending its entitlement to seats as of right in the House of Lords. It also means challenging its longstanding influence over state education.

**“To shape public policy, we need more people to stand up and be counted.”**

One of our objections to faith schools is the use of faith-based criteria in their admissions policies. It was therefore encouraging to see a United Nations committee criticise this form of discrimination in its recent examination of the UK's record on children's rights. The UN child rights committee echoed our call for both religious selection and mandatory worship to end. This is a significant campaigning win that we intend to use to make the case for change.

Organised religion's historic involvement in education shouldn't be allowed to continue to stymie the state from moving towards an inclusive and secular system of schools, more appropriate for modern Britain's religiously diverse and largely nonreligious population of youngsters.

As political parties gear up for the next election, we'll be presenting them with compelling arguments for change. But that is not enough. To shape public policy, we need more people to stand up and be counted. Your membership demonstrates our commitment to a freer, fairer secular society. Now we need you, our members, to mobilise others. Please share our newsletters with friends and family and encourage them to join, too. Only together can we rid this country of religious privilege.

## Success: Mandatory reporting of child sex abuse set to become law

We've achieved a major milestone in our campaign to tackle abuse in religious settings: the government has announced that mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse is set to become law.

The move follows recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, which also said mandatory reporting should not be subject to religious exceptions, such as sacramental confession.

The need for mandatory reporting was demonstrated all too soon after the government's announcement, when it emerged that two bishops in the House of Lords failed to act on historic abuse disclosures.

But the mandatory reporting laws may not go far enough to protect children. Under the proposals, it will be compulsory to report only direct witnessing of child abuse or disclosure from victims or perpetrators. Such cases are rare.

The government has also been criticised for not committing to lift time limits for personal injury claims brought by victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and for putting the financial burden of redressing victims on taxpayers rather than the institutions involved.

The government is now consulting on its proposals. We'll be calling for laws which hold religious institutions fully accountable.



**An independent review into the Church of England's handling of a child sex abuse case found Steven Croft and John Sentamu failed to act on a disclosure. They both have seats in the House of Lords.**

UK parliament

# A win for secularists: UN committee calls for end to religious discrimination in schools

One of the most objectionable aspects of faith schools is that if they're oversubscribed, they can exclude families who don't share their faith.

Now, a United Nations committee has joined us in calling for an end to this unfair and discriminatory system.

In June, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) urged the UK to "guarantee the right of all children to freedom of expression and to practise freely their religion or belief", including by "preventing the use of religion as a selection

criterion for school admissions in England".

It also recommended:

- Repealing legal provisions for compulsory attendance in school collective worship.
- Revising Northern Ireland's heavily Christian education to include a greater diversity of religions.
- Age-appropriate and evidence-based sex education in all schools, including information on same sex relationships and reproductive health rights, with no opt outs for parents. The

government has recently made it compulsory for all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland to teach pupils about abortion and contraception.

We've welcomed these recommendations, which we've raised at the UN repeatedly for many years. It's high time our entire education system was transformed into a secular, inclusive one which equally welcomes children from families of all religions and beliefs. We urge the government to implement the CRC's recommendations to make this a reality.



Keith M Ramsey, Shutterstock

Find out more about our campaign for secular education: [www.secularism.org.uk/education](http://www.secularism.org.uk/education)

## Three more Scottish councils remove religious appointees' voting powers

We're working alongside Scottish councillors and local secularists to strip unfair and undemocratic voting privileges from religious representatives on councils.

Local authorities in Scotland are required by law to appoint three religious representatives to their education committees. At least one must be appointed by the Catholic Church and one by the Church of Scotland. They are usually the only unelected members who receive voting privileges.

Our campaign has seen much success this year, with three councils – Orkney Islands, Highland and Fife – voting to withdraw these privileges in May and June.

We're aware other councils in Scotland are considering the issue. We'll be supporting councillors who want to see the unfair privileges given to religious appointees revoked.



## Ruling: humanists cannot be banned from religious education councils

Among subjects taught in English schools, religious education is the odd one out. It's the only part of the curriculum which is locally determined, largely by Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs).

SACREs must include representatives of religious organisations, who are given voting rights as full members. Many SACREs exclude members of nonreligious communities, such as humanists, from full membership.

That is, until now. In a landmark ruling in May, the High Court determined that barring humanists from SACREs is unlawful discrimination.

The case was raised by Stephen Bowen, a humanist whose 'observer status' on Kent County Council's SACRE did not give him voting rights. When Bowen requested full membership, the council voted to refuse.

The court found it was "clearly discriminatory" to exclude someone from full membership "solely by reference to the fact that their belief, whilst appropriate to be included within the agreed syllabus for religious education, is a non-religious, rather than a religious, belief".

This welcome ruling shines a light on the unsustainable and anachronistic nature of religious education. A locally determined subject largely controlled by religious interest groups is inappropriate in 21st century schools. Reform is clearly more necessary than ever.

# Professor cancelled by Islamic society speaks out at NSS event

"My experience is patently a manifestation of the growing problem of cancel culture in British universities."

That's what Professor Steven Greer, an internationally renowned human rights scholar, told us after he was left fearing for his life following accusations of 'Islamophobia'.

At an online NSS event in March, Prof. Greer explained how he was hounded out of the University of Bristol by the university's Islamic society. In 2020 the society launched



Professor Steven Greer is now Research Director at the Oxford Institute for British Islam.

**"Ideally universities should be free, within the law, to police the sometimes blurred boundaries between what can and cannot be said by their staff. But regrettably they have demonstrated that they can't be trusted to protect academic freedom."**

— Prof. Steven Greer

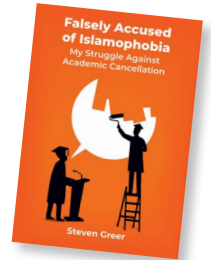
complaints about the content of a human rights law module taught by Prof. Greer, which included discussion of the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings and the traditional death penalty for 'blasphemy' in Islam.

Although Prof. Greer was officially exonerated of all allegations after a five-month inquiry, the university cancelled the module.

During the talk, Prof. Greer said he feared Islamist attacks as a result of the accusations. The stress forced him to take time off sick for months, and he was left feeling betrayed by the university for failing to support him.

Commenting on recent similar cases, he said it was "absolutely disgraceful" that staff and pupils received death threats after being accused of insulting Islam at Batley Grammar

Prof. Greer has published a book about his experiences, in the hope it will encourage others to take a stand for free inquiry and debate.



School and Kettlethorpe High School.

Prof. Greer also criticised attempts to pressure authorities into adopting an "Islamophobia" definition, arguing that it would restrict legitimate critique of Islam.

He hopes sharing his experiences will help protect others from going through a similar ordeal, and safeguard freedom of expression and freedom of inquiry from religious censorship.

■ You can watch Prof. Greer's talk on our YouTube channel: [www.youtube.com/@NationalSecularSociety](http://www.youtube.com/@NationalSecularSociety)

## NSS raises free speech issues at theological colleges

We've submitted evidence to a House of Lords inquiry into the Office for Students (OfS), which regulates higher education in England.

The OfS has failed to address concerns we've raised about OfS-registered theological colleges potentially breaching their funding agreements by restricting academic freedom and freedom of speech. They include Regents Theological College, which requires staff and students to adhere to the statement: "We believe the Bible, as originally given, to be without error".

## Councillor denied mayoralty for criticising Islam

During last year's football World Cup in Qatar, many organisations including ourselves drew attention to the human rights abuses perpetrated by Qatar's Islamic regime. But one councillor's decision to join the criticism cost him his mayoralty.



At the council's annual general meeting, Councillor Gilbert said: "I hold no prejudice against anyone on any inappropriate basis, but I do have specific views on politics, ideology, and religion that I am not willing to suppress in my political position".

As Boston's longest serving councillor, Mike Gilbert was due to be elected mayor in May. But other councillors blocked his mayoralty after accusing him of 'hate speech' for comments he made on Facebook during the World Cup. His posts raised concerns about aspects of Islamic doctrine which criminalise homosexuality and severely restrict the rights of women.

We wrote to all councillors to express our alarm at their dismissal of free speech. We said that in unfairly smearing a fellow councillor, they had made it more difficult to challenge the religiously motivated suppression of women's rights and LGBT equality.

Find out more about our free speech campaigns: [www.secularism.org.uk/free-expression](http://www.secularism.org.uk/free-expression)

# Statue of last person executed for blasphemy in France unveiled

In 1766, 19 year old François-Jean de La Barre was tortured, beheaded and burnt with a copy of Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* nailed to his torso. His crime? Failing to doff his hat in front of a religious procession.

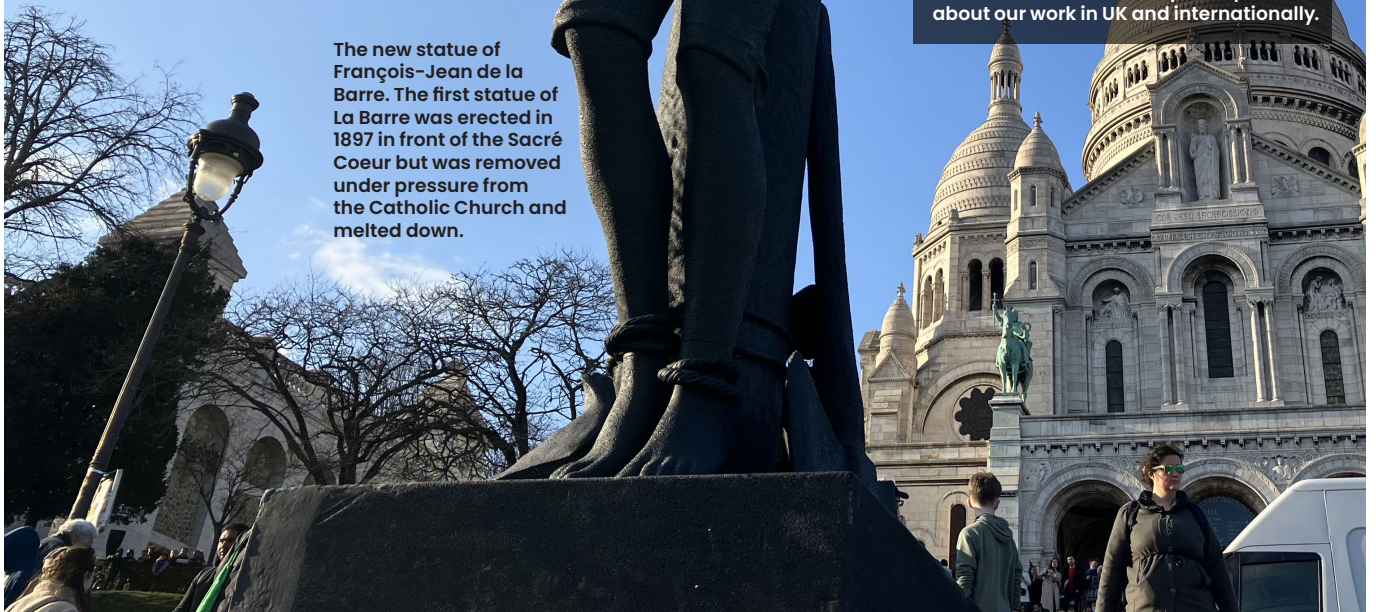
Also known as Chevalier de La Barre, this young man was the last person executed for blasphemy in France.

Over 250 years later, a new statue of La Barre was symbolically erected in front of the Basilica of Sacré Coeur in Montmartre, Paris, in an unveiling ceremony attended by our president Keith Porteous Wood and chief executive Stephen Evans.

The new statue of François-Jean de la Barre. The first statue of La Barre was erected in 1897 in front of the Sacré Coeur but was removed under pressure from the Catholic Church and melted down.



The statue's unveiling in April was part of a two-day international conference on secularism organised by La Fédération nationale de la Libre Pensée, where both Keith and Stephen spoke about our work in UK and internationally.



## Free speech victories

■ Regulators have abandoned proposed rules for advertising after we warned they may result in greater religious censorship. The Committee of Advertising Practice and the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice announced in April they will not adopt stricter guidelines around protected characteristics including religion or belief. We warned this could lead to censorship of adverts that might offend religious beliefs, including depictions of gay people.

■ Northern Ireland's Department of Justice (DoJ) has agreed with the NSS that free speech protections are necessary in hate crime laws. We were one of many respondents to the DoJ's consultation on hate crime last year who opposed broadening the definition of

hate crime and removing the 'dwelling defence', which protects private speech within homes from 'stirring up hate' charges. The DoJ has decided not to broaden hate crime definitions and will retain and modernise the dwelling defence.

■ Diana Barran, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, has corrected the parliamentary record after we pointed out she inaccurately described the UK as having 'no blasphemy laws'. Although blasphemy laws in England, Scotland and Wales have been rightly abolished, they still exist in Northern Ireland. We're campaigning to get them abolished in NI too, so it's important to remind politicians that the work to rid the UK of these illiberal laws is still incomplete.



# Church reigns supreme at coronation

King Charles' coronation was a startling exposure of the Church of England's grip on the state.

During the elaborate Anglican ritual in Westminster Abbey, archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby instructed Charles to swear an oath on the Bible to uphold the CofE's privileges as the established church. Our head of state is the only British citizen who isn't officially free to choose his religion; his oath included swearing that he is a "faithful Protestant". Catholics are specifically barred from the throne.

Before Welby crowned him, Charles disappeared behind a screen for his anointing with consecrated oil, echoing the divine right of kings. This moment was deemed too 'sacred' to be seen by commoners.

By all accounts, Charles is interested in different religions and had requested a more multifaith approach to the coronation. The Church's meagre concession was letting representatives of other religions carry bits and pieces of coronation regalia.

The symbolism couldn't be more striking. Our head of state was an actor in a public ceremony reinforcing the authority, supremacy and privileges of the Church of England, while token members of other religions were relegated to carrying props on stage in a display of subservience.

All to the tune of £250 million, according to some estimates. Naturally, taxpayers footed the bill.

The Church revelled in what amounted to a publicly-funded PR exercise. It called the coronation a "unique missional opportunity" and "a moment for the nation and many around the world to encounter the person of Jesus Christ".

The Church likes to portray itself as a beacon for freedom of belief. But it did nothing when police rounded up and arrested peaceful protestors objecting to the coronation hours before the King set foot in the abbey. No one could be allowed to cast a shadow on the glitz and glamour of the Church's big day.

Secularists and republicans weren't the only ones who objected to the coronation. Even many Anglicans felt it was inappropriate for the Church to dominate the inauguration of the nation's head, when that nation is so irreligious, so diverse, and so rapidly departing the CofE.

The role of head of state in a 21st century democracy should not operate like this. It betrays everything modern Britain should stand for. Britain's head of state should represent all citizens – not just the clergy of a waning Church.



Our criticism of the coronation was widely covered in both national and international press. We spoke out on the BBC, Times Radio, *Christianity Today*, and *The Japan Times*. Stephen Evans was also interviewed by Spanish TV station TVE (pictured).



We commissioned a cartoon by Paul 'Polyp' Fitzgerald to capture the essence of the coronation. We think he nailed it.

# Anglicans and atheists unite to challenge established Church

This year has seen the Church's established status come under unprecedented scrutiny. The coronation, the controversy around the Church's opposition to homosexuality, and repeated safeguarding scandals have all thrown the Church of England's privileges under the spotlight.

We've been a prominent voice in the national conversations about the Church, and our message is clear: separate Church and state.

In the wake of the coronation, we took that message to the heart of parliament itself. We invited four distinguished speakers to discuss the future of Church and state in the Houses of Parliament.

Scottish National Party MP **Tommy Sheppard**, who sponsored the event, said he was "surprised and shocked" by the extent to which the CofE permeates parliament. He said that as we are no longer a Christian country, the role of the Church in parliament is "incredibly unrepresentative" of the population.



From left to right: Dr Martyn Percy, Tommy Sheppard MP, Stephen Evans and Jayne Ozanne.

He has since arranged a Westminster Hall debate on the bishops' bench.

**Jayne Ozanne**, a prominent gay evangelical, said the "tide is turning" on the hypocrisy of the Church lecturing the government on morality. She said establishment doesn't serve the monarch, the country, God or even the bishops. She concluded that establishment doesn't serve "anyone particularly well".

Theologian and priest **Dr Martyn Percy** compared establishment with an old, dusty vestry cupboard overcramped with things no longer

needed. He said the bishops in the Lords are "highly problematic" as they should be there on merit rather than appointed by right. Quoting Michael Caine in *The Italian Job*, he said the solution to the 'vestry cupboard' problem is to "blow the bloody doors off".

Writer and broadcaster **Polly Toynbee** said the coronation was a shocking wake up moment for many people, who were left "gobsmacked" by the highly religious nature of the ceremony. She said it seemed the archbishop had more powers than the King.

It is heartening to see a growing 'broad church' in favour of replacing CofE privilege with equality for all. Our excellent speakers embodied this perfectly.

Support our campaign to separate Church and state:  
[www.secularism.org.uk/disestablishment](http://www.secularism.org.uk/disestablishment)

## Remove bishops from House of Lords, says commission

The 26 CofE bishops appointed to the House of Lords are one of the most unpopular aspects of the established church. Now a commission on political reform has agreed they need to go.

The Commission on Political Power said in a paper published in March that the bishops are an "anomalous" presence and recommended their removal.

We called for this reform in our submission to the commission last year.

Join our campaign to abolish the bishops' bench:  
[www.secularism.org.uk/scrap-bishops-bench](http://www.secularism.org.uk/scrap-bishops-bench)

Throughout spring and summer we continued to speak out for disestablishment:

- NSS representatives gave talks on separating Church and state at national and international conferences and to local affiliate member groups.

- In March, *Pink News* published a piece by Stephen Evans on disestablishment.

- In May we made a submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief saying a lack of separation between Church and state is undermining this freedom in the UK.



NSS head of operations Helen Nicholls (centre; front) spoke at NSS affiliate group North East Humanists in April.



# Victory: government ditches “abhorrent” Christian charity

Should Christian fundamentalists who call other religions “demonic” get public funds to deliver community services?

We don't think so, which is why we alerted the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to a charity it funded whose chair called Islam “demonic” and “spiritual wickedness” in an online video.

The charity, Zion Projects, was awarded over £40,000 last year as part of the government's Faith New Deal scheme for religious organisations which provide community services to “tackle issues affecting the most vulnerable”. We've criticised the discriminatory scheme from the start, because groups with no religious ethos were ineligible.

The DLUHC called Zion Projects' comments “abhorrent”. In April, they told us they had

**Zion Projects chair Danny Stuppel was filmed saying “a very strong force of spiritual wickedness known as Islam is engaging in warfare against the Lord”.**



terminated their funding agreement with the charity.

The case illustrates why the government should be wary about outsourcing public services to religious groups. Unfortunately, many politicians seem all too keen to pander to religion.

In April, faith engagement adviser Colin Bloom published a report recommending increased local and national government engagement with faith groups. The report was based on a 2020 review which was neither fair nor impartial, because wording around the review suggested only responses from religious people would be seriously

considered. We've registered our opposition to many of the report's recommendations with faith and communities minister Jane Scott.

And in May, cabinet ministers spoke at a “National Conservatism” conference organised by American

## Christian charity whose chairman called Islam ‘demonic’ has Government funding pulled

**We were quoted widely in media reports on the government's decision to cut Zion Projects' funding.**

Christian nationalists. The conference's ‘Statement of Principles’ said public life should be “rooted in Christianity” where a “Christian majority” exists.

In the US, erosion of the wall between religion and state is proving toxic to social cohesion, equality and human rights. The government should reject attempts to ape Christian nationalists in appeasing religion by giving it unbridled access to state support.

**Join our campaign to protect secular public services:**  
[www.secularism.org.uk/public-services](http://www.secularism.org.uk/public-services)

## Hospital chaplaincy still has Christian bias

Our latest research found the NHS has made an approximately 20% real terms cut to chaplaincy over a 10 year period. But despite Christians being a minority in England and Wales, nearly 80% of hospital chaplains are Christian.

The NHS's apparent deprioritisation of chaplaincy could reflect the increasingly questionable necessity and appropriateness of hospital chaplains. There is no compelling evidence that spending more on chaplains results in better outcomes for patients. And there have been several incidents where chaplains' religious beliefs have come into conflict with their duty to patients.

When considering how to reform the NHS for greater fairness, effectiveness and best use of limited public funds, chaplaincy must be one area up for review.

*Special thanks to Dominic Wirdnam and Tom Shaw for their research.*

## Government questioned over religious oath bias

The government has been questioned about Royal Holloway University research which found defendants who do not “swear by Almighty God” in court run a higher risk of being found guilty by jurors who themselves take a religious oath.

In April, Green peer Natalie Bennett asked what consideration the government had given the research, and whether there were any plans to update existing rules or guidance.

The government said it does not plan to make changes.

But we think the research stresses the need to replace court oaths and affirmations with a single, secular promise to give truthful evidence.

# Religious homophobia still menaces education

Two recent cases involving state schools reveal homophobia still presents a serious threat to pupils and staff.

■ Teachers at Plashet School in London received threatening complaints which accused staff of “covertly promoting LGBTQ views”



Yusuf Patel, December 2022, lecture at Masjid Tawhid, Leyton on LGBT-inclusive education, uploaded to YouTube

We discovered Yusuf Patel, the founder of a group which spurred on a harassment campaign targeting Plashet School, spoke at an anti-LGBT conference last year.

in an optional lunchtime equalities club. The club, which covered many different equality issues including race and disability, was subsequently cancelled by the school, prompting the staff who ran it to walk out. The complaints had been spurred on by SREIslamic, a group founded by former Hizb ut-Tahrir member Yusuf



Joshua Sutcliffe preaching in London in 2020, uploaded to YouTube

Joshua Sutcliffe is a prominent street preacher whose personal website calls gay sex “an abomination” and says it should be criminalised.

Patel, to “fight for Muslim parental rights”.

■ In May maths teacher Joshua Sutcliffe was banned from the profession after he implied to two LGBT pupils that being gay was wrong and that God could cure it. Sutcliffe also showed pupils a video which criticised men who are “passive” or “not masculine enough”.

**Plashet School staff left in fear over Equalities Club complaints**

We were quoted in *Newham Recorder*, which in April published an expose of the Islamic pressure group behind the harassment of Plashet School.

## Independent faith school failings

April figures from the Department for Education reveal independent schools with a faith ethos are four times more likely to be given warning notices than their nonreligious counterparts. Warning notices are issued when inspectors identify breaches of the independent school standards.

These figures are unsurprising. Independent faith schools often refuse to teach aspects of the curriculum which conflict with religious teachings.

We saw an example in April, when an Ofsted report revealed an Islamic school, Darul Uloom London, thought it was appropriate to discuss the “negative impact of homosexuality” with pupils in response to allegations of sexual harassment. Ofsted said this was “insensitive” and may stop children discussing similar allegations in future.

Meanwhile, UCL research in May found schools are using textbooks published by Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), a fundamentalist Christian organisation, which present climate change denial as fact and describe evolution as an ‘absurd and discredited’ conspiracy. The lead researcher questioned how schools which rely heavily on ACE publications pass Ofsted inspections, given that the materials “clearly fail” to provide a broad and balanced science education and to teach respect for different beliefs.

## MPs debate home education register

We briefed MPs ahead of a parliamentary debate on home education in March, stressing the need for the government to establish a register for children not in school to prevent them ending up in unregistered schools. Many unregistered schools are faith schools which prioritise inculcation of religious ideology over the education and welfare of children.

Several MPs echoed our concerns, and quizzed schools minister Nick Gibb on the government’s commitment to introducing a compulsory register for children not at school, which was included in the now shelved Schools Bill.

In May Flick Drummond MP introduced a private members’ bill to establish home education registers. The bill is scheduled to have its second reading in November.

We’ll be monitoring closely to make sure the government fulfils its stated commitment to introduce a compulsory register.

# NSS calls for action on homophobia and misogyny in charities

We want to see “the advancement of religion” removed from the list of recognised charitable purposes, because it privileges religious organisations by enabling them to register as charities without demonstrating a tangible public benefit. Registered charity status bestows many benefits, not least tax breaks.

What’s worse, “the advancement of religion” may provide a loophole for charities to promote homophobia, misogyny and other extreme ideologies, even though charities are meant to help, not harm, the public.

Last year, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) refused to penalise a Christadelphian charity which posted viciously homophobic and anti-vaccine memes on its Facebook page. And this year, it failed to act against Moray Coast Baptist Church, whose pastor said women should submit to male authority.

In both cases, OSCR said it could not take action because these statements were in accordance with the charities’ religious beliefs.

We therefore wrote to the Scottish minister responsible for charities, Shona Robison MSP, asking for an urgent review into charity law to ensure organisations cannot exploit



Moray Coast Baptist Church pastor Donald Clough said in a sermon the “primary function” of women is to “tend to household affairs – the cooking, the cleaning, the washing up”.

the charity sector to promote intolerance, hatred or discrimination.

Robison said she will begin a review of charity regulation in Scotland this year.

Unfortunately, the problem is not confined to Scotland. Northern Ireland’s charity commission has also refused to tackle homophobia in religious charities, including those which promote ‘conversion therapy’.

As a result, we continue to see new charities register in NI which promote discrimination against gay people. In February, a number of homophobic



David McLaughlin, minister and trustee of Carryduff Free Presbyterian Church, said in a sermon that same sex marriage “opens the floodgates” and asked, “could a man get married to his dog or his donkey? Why not?”.

Free Presbyterian churches registered, including one whose minister and trustee compared gay marriage to bestiality.

We’re raising awareness of these problems. The charity press, including *Third Sector*, *Third Force News* and *Civil Society*, have recently run several stories on these charities over the past few months highlighting our concerns.

Join our campaign to reform charity law:  
[www.secularism.org.uk/charities](http://www.secularism.org.uk/charities)

## Charities running unethical ‘crisis pregnancy centres’

A BBC *Panorama* investigation aired in February revealed worrying numbers of ‘crisis pregnancy centres’ are giving women misleading medical information and unethical advice to dissuade them from having abortions. Such centres’ opposition to abortion is usually linked to religion.

We’ve therefore urged charity ministers in Scotland and Northern Ireland to review the charitable status of such centres. We cannot accept that misleading pregnant women is compatible with the duty of charities to serve a public benefit.

## BRITISH ATTITUDES TO RELIGION

**66%**  
of British people believe religion does more harm in the world than good.

Source: Ipsos, May 2023

**88%**  
of Brits are completely comfortable being around people who have different religious beliefs than them.

Source: Ipsos, May 2023

**76%**  
of Brits say it’s not necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values.

Source: Pew Research Center, April 2023

# Nicky Campbell to speak at Bradlaugh Lecture

We are delighted to announce that broadcaster and journalist Nicky Campbell will deliver this year's Bradlaugh Lecture.

Campbell is a familiar face to many Sunday morning TV viewers as host of *The Big Questions* – an ethical and religious debate show which ran on BBC1 between 2007 and 2021. Through this show, Campbell provided a crucial space for religious



and nonreligious people alike to come together and robustly debate often highly controversial topics with candour and good humour.

At the lecture, Campbell will talk about how the media covers religion, and reflect on his life exploring issues of religion and society.

Named after NSS founder Charles Bradlaugh, our annual Bradlaugh Lecture gives an opportunity for distinguished

speakers to explore a secularist topic in depth. The lecture will take place at the Manchester Art Gallery, which displays a portrait of Bradlaugh by Walter Sickert.

## BRADLAUGH LECTURE 2023

Saturday 30th September

Manchester Art Gallery, M2 3JL

14:00–17:00 (includes drinks reception)

NSS members £5, non-members £15

Book your place at [www.secularism.org.uk/2023-nicky-campbell](http://www.secularism.org.uk/2023-nicky-campbell)

## Celebrating the life of a former NSS president

June 2nd would have been the 100th birthday of our former president Barbara Smoker, who died in 2020 at the age of 96. We picked this day to hold a memorial service to celebrate her life and many achievements.

Barbara Smoker was one of the longest-serving presidents of the NSS (1972 – 1996) and was an uncompromising advocate for freedom of expression, women's and LGBT rights, and assisted dying reform.

Family, friends and colleagues gave speeches remembering Barbara and an extraordinary life well-lived. The memorial at Conway Hall in London was well attended despite rail strikes, with guests including a large contingent of the Smoker family.

It was wonderful to hear so many anecdotes, many amusing, many inspiring, about Barbara's life. All agreed she had been very much ahead of her time and that many of the causes for which she fought are now taken for granted.

A portrait of Barbara Smoker by her nephew Mark was presented to the NSS during the memorial.



## NSS speaks out at genital autonomy event

May 7th is the Worldwide Day of Genital Autonomy, and this year our campaigns officer Dr Alejandro Sanchez joined advocates in Cologne to speak out against all forms of non-consensual religious genital cutting.

In his speech, Alejandro urged the government to ensure no one is subjected to unnecessary medical or surgical treatment during childhood.



Alejandro Sanchez (furthest right) joined Terre de Femmes, an anti-female genital mutilation organisation, and 15 Square, a support group for men affected by circumcision, at this year's Worldwide Day of Genital Autonomy.

## Welcome Fódhla!

We're pleased to welcome Fódhla Brady as our new membership and engagement officer. Fódhla graduated from UCL in 2022 with a BSc in Social Sciences with Quantitative Methods, and has previously worked in the higher education and charity sectors.



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