

challenging religious privilege

Annual Report
2005

national
secular
society

Message from the President

Secularism is becoming one of the defining issues of this decade, if not the century. As religion spreads violence and terror throughout the world, people are looking for an alternative way to structure society that will protect them from the tyrants and despots in clerical garb. That alternative way is Secularism.

Secularism guarantees freedom of conscience to all citizens, to worship in their own way or not to worship, to speak freely and exchange ideas without restraint from superstitious censors. Under a secular constitution that is democratically supported, no religion can dominate and none can be disadvantaged.

But, far from being portrayed as the ideal of fairness we know it to be, Secularism is being branded increasingly – even in the UK – as an enemy in its own right by religious leaders and commentators with their own self-interested agenda. The USA, Turkey and India – all have a secular constitution, and in all of those countries it is under ferocious attack from sectarian interests that are anxious to take the reigns of power and impose their own theology on everyone, willing or not.

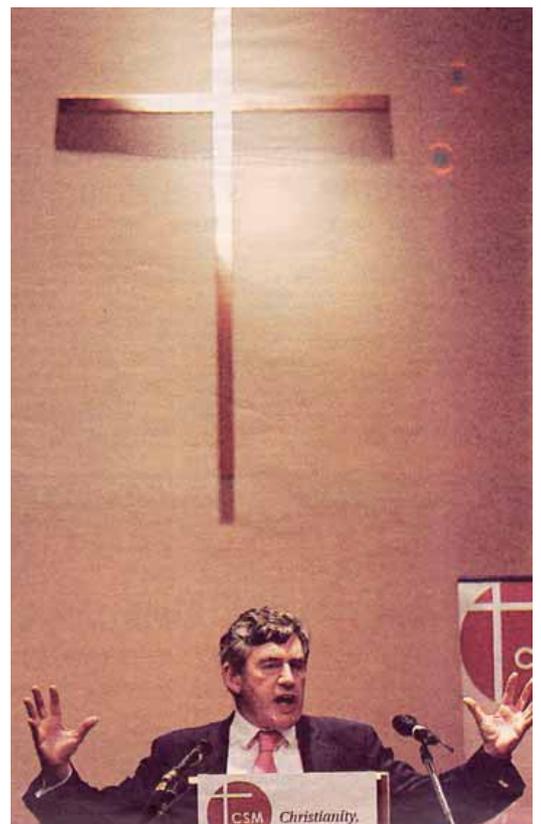
In Britain, religion does not have the overarching popular support that it has in so many other parts of the world. But that does not mean it has no influence. Our Christian prime minister continues to force his faith on to the rest of us, despite clear evidence that we do not want it.

Under a secular constitution that is democratically supported, no religion can dominate and none can be disadvantaged

Mr Blair and his Christian cohorts continue to hand over huge tracts of our education system to proselytising religious interests, creating injustice in access, and abusing the rights of children to be free of religion if that is what their conscience dictates. As one of his own backbenchers, Ken Purchase, Labour MP for Wolverhampton North East, said, Mr Blair's education policy is "driven by extremism at the heart of the government".

But even when Mr Blair steps down, we are not confident that that much would change if Gordon Brown were to succeed him as Prime Minister.

Religious censors have also revived themselves in the past year to dramatic effect. Religion desperately wants to control the cultural agenda, and limit artistic freedom if it is critical or challenging. The BBC abandoned its *Popetown* cartoon; performances of the controversial Sikh play *Behzti* were cancelled after violent protests; and the screening of *Jerry Springer – the Opera* sparked very vocal protests and attempted legal sanctions. We have been actively supporting freedom of expression in each case.



Will the next PM be any less pious than the present one?

We fear that the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill augurs a further restriction of open debate and criticism of religion in this country. We have fought this too and many of the manifold religious exemptions demanded by religious bodies to legislation which seeks to impose equality and resist bigotry. Other disturbing developments afoot are a huge increase in faith-based welfare and attempts to replace the Establishment of the Church of England with some multi-faith equivalent, further isolating those who are not religious.

Many people are telling us that they are frightened by what is happening to our society and culture and they want to stand against the unbidden encroachment of religion into their lives

Islam, too, has dominated much of European political life. One bloody outrage associated with extremists has followed another, and clerics have displayed medieval attitudes to women and homosexuals. These are causing even the most liberal to reassess their attitudes. The millions of moderate Muslims have seemed powerless and largely mute, although the 7 July 2005 London bombings may have prompted them to be more assertive. How can we cope with murderous religious fanatics in our midst without fatally compromising our own freedoms, and thereby handing victory to them on a plate?

All this has prompted unprecedented growth and activity for the National Secular Society. We have seen an extraordinary influx of new members, attracted by our raised profile and constant engagement in events as they develop. Many people are telling us that they are frightened by what is happening to our society and culture and they want to stand against the unbidden encroachment of religion into their lives.

With your help, we will endeavour to make the NSS grow stronger and more influential.



Denis Cobell
President

Religious Hatred

The NSS was first to raise the alarm about the Government's plans for new legislation outlawing religious hatred. This is the third attempt that New Labour has made to get this legislation through. On previous occasions, opposition was almost unanimous – as it has been on this latest occasion.

As more and more groups and individuals spoke out against the proposed law, the NSS ensured that the issue remained high on the agenda. We have taken part in many broadcasts, provided endless research for journalists, coordinated meetings in Parliament, held meetings with Government and shadow ministers and ensured that the challenge was strong and clear.

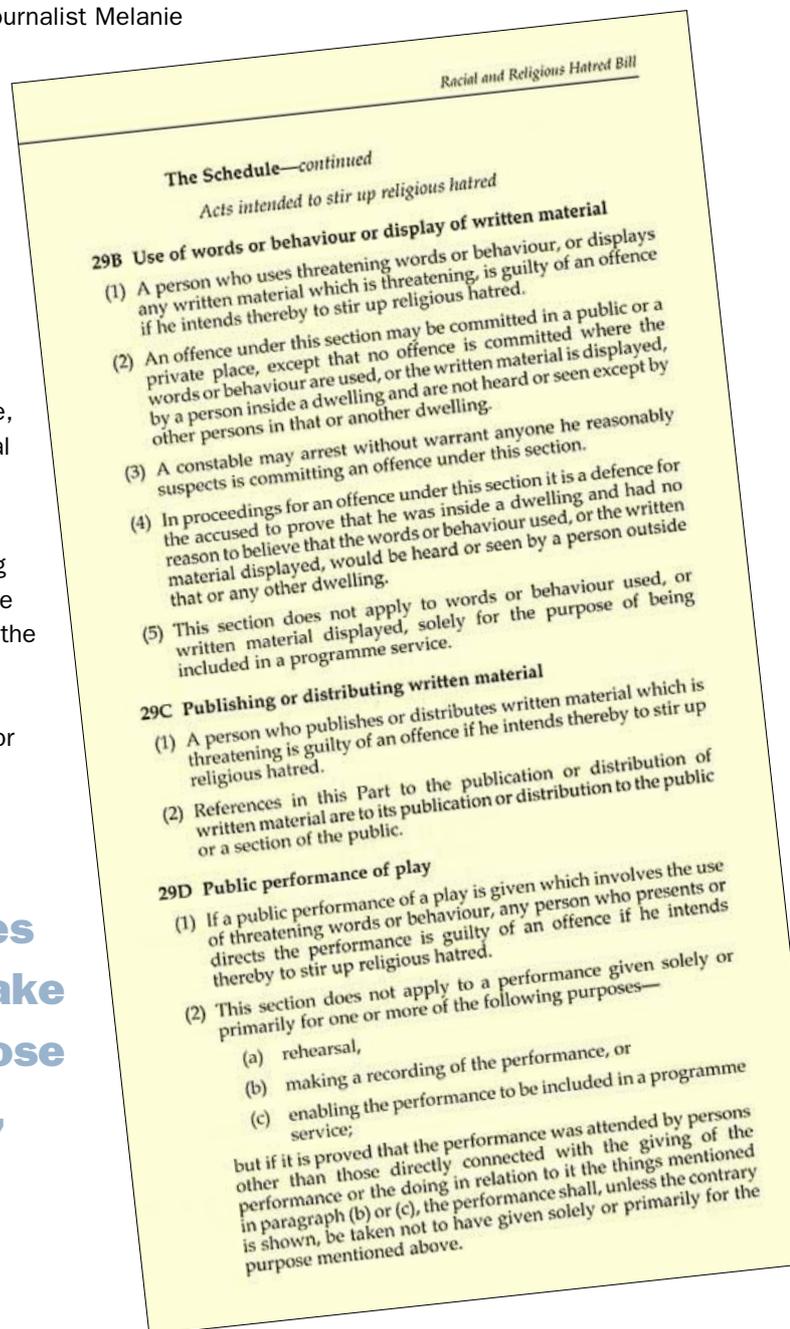
During this extremely high-profile campaign, we have formed surprising temporary alliances with several organisations and individuals. It seems slightly surreal that we have thrown in our lot (on this particular issue and no others) with the Christian Institute, the Evangelical Alliance and right-wing journalist Melanie Phillips. Opposing this Bill was so fundamental to our objectives that we were prepared to make common cause with even those who, in other circumstances, we would totally oppose.

The NSS has been lobbying heavily in both Houses of Parliament, where numerous members and peers have spoken using our briefings. Our Honorary Associates there – especially Dr Evan Harris MP and Lady Turner of Camden – have been very active in promoting our view. The Society was mentioned numerous times in debate, as was our demonstration – along with evangelical Christian groups – outside Parliament to protest against the Bill.

We played a leading part in the Government being forced by a majority of 149 votes to accept a huge amendment in the Committee stage of the Bill in the Lords. The Conservative and LibDem frontbench spokespeople and even the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, wrote to us to thank us for our effective campaign.

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The Bill as amended, but it still has to survive a Commons onslaught



Religious Censorship

One of the most significant events of the past year was the attempt to pressurise the BBC into dropping a broadcast of *Jerry Springer – the Opera*. A previously obscure group named Christian Voice suddenly burst into the public arena after implausibly inciting over 60,000 complaints to the BBC prior to the broadcast.

The NSS was on the front line defending the BBC's right to broadcast the programme. Our campaign was reported extensively throughout the world. The BBC resisted the pressure and went ahead with the show. But this pressure came hot on the heels of an incident in Birmingham in which a group of fundamentalist Sikhs had managed, by violent means, to close a play at the Repertory Theatre. The reason? They did not like the critical way it looked at their religion.

These two incidents – together with news that the BBC had scrapped a cartoon series called *Popetown* at the behest of the Catholic Church – sparked a national debate on the influence of religion in politics and culture at which the NSS was at the heart. We have done literally scores of broadcasts on this topic over the past year, and still the requests come in.



**London Theatre
staging *Jerry
Springer the Opera***

Religious Schools

The relentless march of religious schools is still high on the agenda, and the NSS has ensured that opposition to them remained highly visible. Once again we have been recognised as the leading opposition to these plans and consequently we are constantly being sought out by journalists and broadcasters for comment and background information.

The Government, not satisfied with expanding the number of Christian schools to unprecedented levels, has now decided that it will give state funding to as many as 150 private Muslim schools. It will also allow 40 per cent of city academies to be taken over by religious bodies – some of which are extreme and fundamentalist.

A brave fightback by parents in Conisbrough near Doncaster resulted in the defeat of a proposal by evangelist Sir Peter Vardy to open a religious academy there. The NSS did however play a key role by involving our lawyers who ingeniously sought out some legal objections, which alas could not easily be applied in other cases.

Like academies, new school trusts announced in an Education White Paper are just another covert device dreamed up by the Government in its relentless drive to ease the path for the opening of a further wave of religious schools at minimal cost to their promoters. The Church of England is rubbing its hands in glee.

The NSS has been successful in raising awareness among journalists and getting concerns discussed in the media. This has not however dissuaded the Government from continuing to push through this misguided policy in the face of increasing public unease and widespread opposition from parents and education professionals alike. In one ICM poll two-thirds oppose the policy, as do 96 per cent in another, conducted by the *New Statesman*. It seems that no amount of persuasion, however reasoned, will deflect this government from its determination to place religion at the centre of all our lives.

Religious Education

At the behest of the Religious Education Council, the government is putting huge new resources into strengthening religious education in our schools.

The NSS remains firmly opposed to such disproportionate and unwanted emphasis on religion in our education system. Two large-scale surveys show that two-thirds of secondary school children in Britain define themselves as atheist or agnostic – but their conscience is not respected and they are forced by law to study religion as though it were the most important subject on the curriculum.

In countries such as France, the USA and Turkey, which have secular constitutions firmly separating religion from the state, there is strictly no religion in schools. These countries do not seem to be suffering the decline in religious interest that the proponents of religion in schools constantly predict.

It is clear that because the churches are hurtling towards extinction in Britain, they have shifted their emphasis from worship in the pews to indoctrination in schools. Getting at vulnerable children where they can't escape the evangelising has now become the *raison d'être* of the churches. The Government is clearing a path for religious bodies to turn our schools into extensions of churches and mosques. The Archbishop of Canterbury's opinion that "School is Church" has never been truer.

The NSS is seeking assurance from the Education Secretary that if parents exercise their legal right to exempt their children from religious education lessons, the children will be given a constructive alternative activity. We want parents to be able to withdraw their children from religious worship and religious indoctrination in schools safe in the knowledge that they will not be disadvantaged.

We are working to increase awareness of parents' legal right to withdraw children from RE and reminding them of this right through *Newsline*.



Education Secretary Ruth Kelly, a member of the sinister Opus Dei organisation

Battles with the BBC

The NSS continues to press for a fairer representation of non-believers in BBC programmes. It's not that secularists are never mentioned, it is simply that we are not given the untrammelled opportunity to put our case as religious apologists are.

We have complained to the religious propaganda department of the BBC several times this year about the way that secularists and secularism have been presented, particularly on Radio 4. On several programmes, secularism has been misrepresented and criticised without the opportunity for a response. If secularists are included, they are generally put under heavy pressure by presenters or they are put up against religious spokespeople who get far more time to put their cases. We are almost always reacting – we are never allowed to speak about our own initiatives.

One programme, *Losing My Religion*, was supposed to be about people who had grown out of "faith" but, instead of letting them tell their own stories without comment, each was interspersed with a cleric pointing out alleged weaknesses in their stance. The clerics were all named, but the non-believers remained anonymous – rather like the equivalent of being interviewed in silhouette when there's something shameful under discussion.

In an edition of *The Westminster Hour* about the influence of religion in politics, the NSS was named and described erroneously (and not very flatteringly) by the presenter Dennis Sewell. He then sought out the opinion of several clerics. Despite several references to “aggressive secularists” and “militant atheists”, not one non-believer was permitted to contribute to the programme. We were talked about, but were not allowed to put our case. Our request for a right of reply was dismissed, and this is the source of much frustration and anger among members.

The BBC remains impervious to our complaints and, despite a great deal of correspondence, the replies remain patronising and dismissive. The exception was Jonathan Miller’s excellent *A Short History of Disbelief*, which, after much pressure, was repeated on BBC2. This, though, seems to be the sum total of our contribution to the debate. Dr Miller’s programme is cited every time we complain, but no account is taken of the fact that religion gets at least ten times this amount of time every week on the BBC. When will the next programme aimed at the non-religious be seen? The BBC could go some way towards putting this right this injustice by opening up Thought for the Day to non-religious contributors too, but it obstinately refuses to do so.

The NSS has made responses to several government consultations about the BBC and its future, and the bias in its complaints procedure.

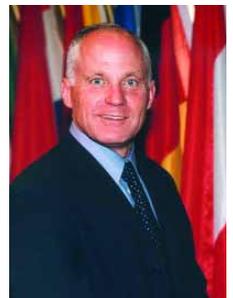
NSS in Europe

Although the European Constitution was rejected, the infamous Article 52 of that charter – which grants special consultation rights to religious organisations – lives on. This is because it was already a clause in the Treaty of Amsterdam. Although this Treaty is not binding in the way the Constitution would have been, the clause is being exploited with new vigour.

The European Parliament has been debating how these “consultations” are being conducted. Secularist MEPs wanted to know why, for example, the European Humanist Federation which had formerly been consulted, was now being ignored while the Scientologists were suddenly being included in consultations. Detailed questions about the basis of the consultations and lack of transparency have been raised by Michael Cashman and colleagues on the floor of the EU Parliament. Keith Porteous Wood has also explored these matters at a private meeting at the European Commission HQ. He did so with one of President Barroso’s four advisers, H.E. Dr Michael Weninger, the President’s adviser on religious matters. Although Dr Weninger staunchly maintained that his religious views had no bearing on the conduct of his job, he was convinced that “transcendental” organisations had a special contribution to make.

There seems little doubt that religious influence – especially from the Vatican – has grown at the very heart of the EU power bases. MEPs also accused the European Commissioner Jacques Barrot of giving special privileges to the Catholic Church and one even accused the Vatican of “milking” the EU for funds.

NSS Honorary Associate Michael Cashman MEP was at the forefront of the battle to block a grant of 1.5 million euros to the Vatican towards its “World Youth Day” in Germany. He and fellow campaigners succeeded in having the grant turned down by the European Parliament. Despite this, the European Commission later defiantly paid the grant out of its own budget, and the Pope received this public money for



Michael Cashman MEP



Barbara Smoker

blatant religious proselytising. A much greater sum still was paid out of German public funds.

Volunteer Muriel Fraser continues to provide an excellent focal point for the opposition to the establishment of concordats between the Vatican and various European states. The concordats, which are highly undemocratic and, for the most part, kept secret until opposition becomes impossible, give the Vatican enormous financial and political privileges. Muriel's excellent "Concordat Watch" feature can be found on our website at www.secularism.org.uk. It is becoming a much-used resource by secularists all over Europe and it has been drawn to the attention of lawyers undertaking a formal study of concordats for the European Commission.

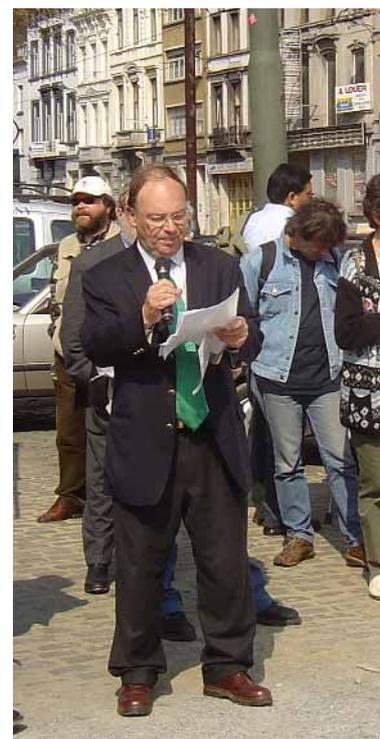
A delegation from the NSS took part in a demonstration outside the European Parliament in Brussels demanding that the secular tradition of the EU be protected from religious pressures.

The NSS provided two speakers for an international conference in Paris this year on the topic of separating religion and state. It was timed to commemorate the centenary of the 1905 French law that separated church and state so effectively. The conference was in two parts: one organised by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU, the worldwide umbrella organisation for humanists), the other by the Worldwide Congress of Freethought (WCF).

Terry Sanderson ran a workshop on effective use of the media. Keith Porteous Wood chaired one of the main IHEU debates, on secularism in the European Union. It turned out to be one of the more lively events, exposing a sharp divergence of opinion. Some humanists were happy with "state neutrality" – going along with religious privileges (such as receiving state funds), as long as they could also share in them. Others, such as the NSS and our French counterparts Libre Pensée, argued passionately for complete separation – no privileges at all. Keith also gave the closing address for the WCF, calling on each national organisation to nominate a representative for a newly formed International Liaison Committee of Atheists and Freethinkers.

The conference was held at the UNESCO headquarters and concluded at the Sorbonne, where Barbara Smoker, NSS President for a quarter of a century to 1996, was presented with a Distinguished Humanist award.

On the subject of the UN, it unfortunately suffers even more from religious interference than the EU. Human rights are increasingly being branded as a Western construct inapplicable to other parts of the world where often much less equitable, religious, values dominate.



Keith Porteous Wood addressing the demonstrators



The demonstrators

Consultation and Responses

The NSS continues to respond to government consultations in the hope of persuading it to reduce or modify the influence of religion on policy-making. This year we have responded on topics as diverse as the future of the BBC, charity law reform, religious schools, and school admissions policies.

The Society contributed to the debate on updating the Sex Discrimination Act. We supported positive changes to the Act, such as the reduction of exemptions from relevant equality legislation in respect of ministers of religion. We pointed out that the power of religion was one of the most potent challenges to establishing true equality for women.

We commented on proposals about the administration of justice, an area increasingly under threat from the misguided intervention of religion. One of these was on the selection of juries and another, to the Department of Constitutional Affairs, was on diversity in the judiciary. We supported diversity in the judiciary because under-representation of women is a particular problem. Nevertheless, we took the opportunity to reinforce our conviction that there should be one justice system applicable to all. This is infinitely preferable to permitting religious justice systems which are rooted in the deep past and which have no commitment to human rights. Council member Anna Behan and Mazin Zeki played a leading role in these submissions.

A major consultation response to the Home Affairs Select Committee covered religious hatred, blasphemy and religious discrimination. Our implacable opposition to the religious hatred provisions was referred to by the Committee in its final report. Our submission was completed by Keith Porteous Wood with assistance from Dr Evan Harris MP.

Keith's consultation response for the next Census exposed the illegitimacy of the much quoted 72 per cent of the population being Christians. It drew comment in *The Guardian* and prompted an article in the *New Statesman*. We suggested the question be withdrawn, or – failing that – we made practical proposals for a much more accurate basis of calculation. We backed up our arguments with academic research and numerous statistics. We know from the reaction from Whitehall that it has been read carefully.

We have also taken part in several government advisory bodies in the hope of providing some balance against the overwhelming religious presence, and had meetings at government ministries and also with the minister about the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill and the Equality Bill, both of which offer unprecedented privileges to religious groups. Council member Anna Behan and Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood have been foremost in this time-consuming but important work.



Dr Evan Harris MP



Anna Behan

Parliament

References elsewhere in this report give a glimpse of the depth of our involvement in Parliament, our most successful year there by far. Amendments to Bills have been tabled at our instigation. The only amendment volunteered by the Government to the religious hatred provisions up to the time this report went to press originated at the NSS.

Keith Porteous Wood addressed peers at a meeting on the religious hatred provisions in the House of Lords' Moses Room.

The Society has been directly referred to in Parliament on numerous occasions in the last year, in both Houses, by all major parties and even from the Bishops' Bench. We have caused parliamentary questions to be tabled which have elicited important information or prompted the Government to agree to take action. We have frequently been consulted behind the scenes by opposition parliamentarians seeking detailed information and assistance and, on occasion, suggestions for opposing government measures. In some debates we have seen our points being made one after another by recipients of our briefings.



Keith Porteous Wood being interviewed at Westminster about the Religious Hatred Bill and our demonstration

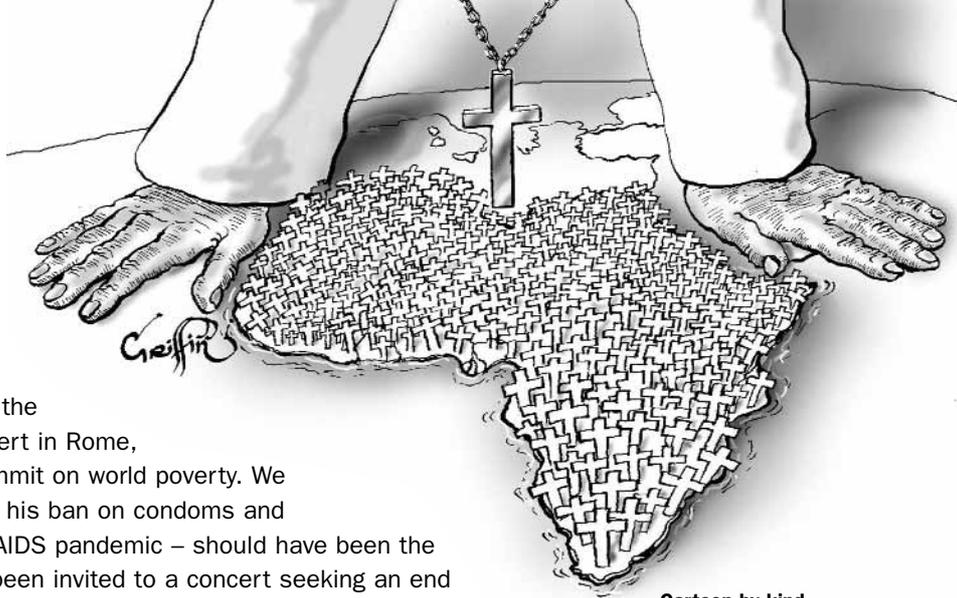
We are most grateful to the many parliamentarians who have supported the points made in our briefings in the lobbies and especially those who have tabled amendments or spoken on them. We particularly thank our Parliamentary Honorary Associates for their support. Dr Evan Harris MP deserves a further special mention for his brilliant tactics opposing the religious hatred provisions. Lady Turner of Camden has also been an invaluable ally, both in tabling amendments and by speaking with such persuasion. We have also appreciated support from Lords Peston and Wedderburn of Charlton, QC and MPs Graham Allen, Bob Marshall-Andrews and Paul Holmes.

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We similarly thank Lord Lester of Herne Hill, QC, the eminent human rights lawyer. A spectacular example of our cooperation with him occurred during the passage of the Equality Bill. We passed onto him a letter to *Newsline* whose writer was complaining about having been denied a leadership position in the Beaver scouts solely because she was not religious. The timing was perfect. Within 24 hours Lord Lester was able to quote from the letter in detail in a Lords debate to argue against a religious exemption being sought that would have allowed such injustices. He was successful and the exemption was defeated.

We are in increasing contact with frontbench spokespeople and are regularly consulted by parliamentarians and have met ministers. Our activities in Parliament have brought us many new contacts who are anxious to come aboard and lend a hand. Keith Porteous Wood has been our stalwart in Westminster, both in the Houses of Parliament and in the television and radio studios.

Other Activities



Cartoon by kind permission of Charles Griffin. It first appeared in *The Sun* in June 2005

The NSS objected to an invitation by Sir Bob Geldof to the Pope to attend the Live8 concert in Rome, held at the time of the G8 summit on world poverty. We reasoned that the Pope – with his ban on condoms and subsequent worsening of the AIDS pandemic – should have been the last person on Earth to have been invited to a concert seeking an end to poverty and disadvantage in Africa. The story was carried on international news wires.

NSS President Denis Cobell gave an alternative Christmas Message on BBC London 94.9.

The NSS has taken part in two debates at the Cambridge Union this year – one with Evan Harris and Keith Porteous Wood, the other with Council member Norman Bacrac. Another debate took place at Durham University, with Honorary Associate Jonathan Meades and Keith Porteous Wood flying the flag. The President (Denis Cobell) and Honorary Associate Joan Smith have also been active in debates fighting our corner.

The NSS challenged plans by a group of 11 high-profile employers who launched a new organisation to help firms “recognise the religious needs of employees”. It aimed to enable ethnic workers to celebrate holy days and to “promote good business practice toward religious belief”. The NSS wrote to the organisers demanding to know how non-believing employees would fare in all this – would they have to pick up extra work as a result of religious people taking time out for prayers and religious holidays? A meeting has been promised.

The NSS has been closely involved in government planning for a proposed new single equality body and an Equality Act that will institute it. Council member Anna Behan has been busily consulting with Home Office officials and replying to various consultations about these plans, which potentially offer even more privilege to the religious.



Joan Smith

Members’ Day – *Active Secularism*

A skill-sharing day for activists and potential activists called *Active Secularism* was held in September 2005. Participants came from all over the country to brush up media and internet skills; some came to find out how to start a local group. We thank those who organised the day – council members Jennifer Jaynes and Malcolm Trahearn – and those who provided information and support. They were Allen Hayes, Terry Sanderson, Keith Porteous Wood, Sue Lord, Nick Pullar and Peter Vlachos.

New Image for the NSS

The NSS has had an image overhaul, which has given it a bright, modern look. Our new logo and publications were designed by member Bradley Davis and our overall new look was created and supervised by Marla Madison, both of whom donated their considerable talents. The revamp extended to our website, too, and this has been completely redesigned and is much easier to use. We hope that you'll visit frequently to keep yourself updated about the NSS's activities.

Secularist of the Year

We were very grateful to Dr Michael Irwin for his offer to sponsor an award for Secularist of the Year. He has donated an annual amount of £5,000 to be awarded to the person adjudged to have made a significant contribution to the cause of secularism in the preceding year. This year's winner was Maryam Namazie, the feminist and inveterate campaigner for secularism in Iran. Maryam received her prize at a glittering formal lunch at an elegant hotel in central London, dubbed by some the most successful social event they had attended this year. The award ceremony was full to capacity and several of our Honorary Associates came along to lend support, including Polly Toynbee, Joan Smith, Martin Rowson, Jonathan Meades and Dr Evan Harris MP.

Another award, a lifetime achievement award, was presented at the lunch to veteran NSS campaigner Bill McIlroy for his 50 years of unbroken service to the movement. During this time, Bill has been a *Freethinker* editor more than once and was also employed as the NSS's General Secretary. He has also been on the NSS Council twice – a role from which he has only just stepped down.



Maryam Namazie, Secularist of the Year



Polly Toynbee and Dr Michael Irwin compare notes



Stewart Lee brings the house down



Lifetime achievement award-winner Bill McIlroy

Newsline

Our weekly e-newsletter goes from strength to strength and now has a readership of many thousands. It has become not only essential reading for activists, but a useful place to exchange information, advice and humour. It also carries details of our latest merchandise. The letters column has been particularly busy this year. *Newsline* has also become a magnet for journalists looking for an unusual angle on the stories of the day. It leads to many enquiries from the press and broadcasters, and sometimes stories in national newspapers. The compiling editor is Vice-President Terry Sanderson. If you aren't on the list, and would like to subscribe, it doesn't cost anything. Just send a blank email with "subscribe to Newsline" on the subject line and send it to enquiries@secularism.org.uk.

If you don't have a computer and would like a printed version, simply send a supply of C5 stamped addressed envelopes to *Newsline*, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL and we'll let you know when they need renewing. (This service is available to members only).

Media Coverage

The NSS sets great store by getting its message out to the world at large. This year has seen unprecedented exposure for our activities in the mainstream media. The Executive Director and Vice-President Terry Sanderson, who is also our media officer, have given literally dozens of interviews on radio and TV and to print journalists. No opportunity to get our message over, however modest, is missed. We have been on prestigious news programmes such as *Today*, *PM* and *The World Tonight* on radio and the *Six O'Clock News*, *BBC Breakfast*, *News 24* and *Sky News*. We have contributed to discussions on just about every local radio station in the country, BBC and commercial.

Columnists and Honorary Associates Nick Cohen, Joan Smith and Polly Toynbee have actively promoted secularist ideals throughout the year; we are most grateful to them.

We have also been involved in several high-profile documentaries on radio and television. We have appeared in every national and regional newspaper, as well as many local papers, specialist papers and trade journals. To list all our media successes would take up most of this report, but you can see what we have achieved each week in *Newsline*.

Our success in promoting the message in the world at large has resulted in a big rise in membership. Although seasoned campaigners active in the 1950s assure us that our media coverage is the highest in living memory, we will continue to push ever harder for greater visibility.

There are signs that Keith Charters, convenor of NSS~Scotland, is becoming known among Scottish journalists and broadcasters and is adding to his tally of media successes north of the Border.



Terry Sanderson

Your Council

As at 30 September 2005 the Council of Management comprised:

Officers:

President:

Denis Cobell

Vice Presidents:

Jim Herrick & Terry Sanderson

Treasurer:

Afonso Reis e Sousa

Council Members:

Ian Andrews

Norman Bacrac

Anna Behan

Dan Bye

Keith Charters

A. E. L. Davis

Jennifer Jaynes

Surendra Lal

Bill McIlroy

Liz Thompson

Malcolm Trahearn

Peter Vlachos

Executive Director:

Keith Porteous Wood, FCCA

Honorary Associates:

Graham Allen MP

Prof. Peter Atkins

Iain Banks

Lorraine Barrett AM*

Edward Bond

Michael Cashman MEP

Nick Cohen

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Lord Desai

Rt. Hon. Michael Foot

Prof. A. C. Grayling

Dr. Evan Harris MP

Patrick Harvie MSP*

Christopher Hitchens

Paul Holmes MP

Prof. Ted Honderich

Sir Ludovic Kennedy

Graham Linehan

Robert Marshall-Andrews QC, MP*

Baroness Massey of Darwen

Lord McIntosh of Haringey

Jonathan Meades

George Melly

Sir Jonathan Miller

Taslina Nasrin

Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan

Lord Peston

Harold Pinter

Philip Pullman

Lord Raglan

Claire Rayner

Martin Rowson

Joan Ruddock MP

Joan Smith

Dr. David Starkey

Polly Toynbee

Baroness Turner of Camden

Gore Vidal

Prof. Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC*



Lorraine Barrett AM



Patrick Harvie MSP



Robert Marshall-Andrews QC, MP



Prof. Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC

*These four were appointed during the last year.

Volunteers

It would be impossible to sustain the NSS at the current level of activity without the invaluable help of our excellent corps of volunteers. Council thanks them all.

Affiliated Local Groups

Birmingham Humanist Group; Blackpool & Fylde Humanists; Brighton & Hove Humanist Group; Bristol Humanists; Bromley Humanist Group; Chiltern Humanists; Cornwall Humanists; Cotswold Humanists; Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists; Croydon Humanists; Devon Humanists; Ealing Humanist Group; East Cheshire & High Peak Secular Group; East Kent Humanists; Essex Humanists; Greater Manchester Humanist Group; Hampstead Humanist Society; Havering & District Humanist Society; Humanist Society of West Yorkshire; Leicester Secular Society; Lewisham Humanist Group; Norfolk Humanists; North East Humanists; North London Humanist Group; Sheffield Humanist Society; South Hampshire Humanists; Suffolk Humanists; Sutton Humanist Group; Welsh Marches Humanist Group; West Glamorgan Humanist Group

Organisations to which the NSS is Affiliated

Abortion Law Reform Association; Amnesty International; European Humanist Federation; International Humanist and Ethical Union; Liberty; and Network for Peace Council. We also support the Humanist Peace Forum and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

LARGE PRINT AND AUDIO VERSIONS OF THIS REPORT ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

We invite you to join the National Secular Society and in doing so support our work

The NSS is certainly vigorous in its opposition to the forces of superstition, obscurantism, and illiberalism; but that is merely another way of looking at its support for liberal causes. When it campaigns against censorship, it is campaigning for freedom of expression; when it campaigns against faith schools, it is campaigning for educational impartiality; and when it campaigns against any of the social and fiscal survivals of religious privilege, it is campaigning for equality in a pluralist society.

By signing up overleaf, or on line, you will be applying to join the National Secular Society and accepting the aims and objectives of the Society shown in this booklet and acknowledging that your membership application is subject to ratification by the NSS Council of Management.

Subscription details

UK membership is £22 per annum (£13 unwaged).

Joint UK membership (two people living at the same address) is £34.

Associate membership for those living outside the UK is £39 and for UK residents under 18 years of age it is £13.

(All payments must be in £ sterling drawn on UK banks and payable to NSS).

Membership is renewable every 1st January, but those joining between September – December do not have to renew until the next following 1st January.

It is easy to join securely on line at www.secularism.org.uk/join.html or by sending in the application form that follows.

If you do not need this invitation, but know of a friend or colleague that might be interested in it, please pass on to them this form, or the whole report.

Join Us

You can join and pay online using our secure credit card service at www.secularism.org.uk/join.html or complete the form overleaf and return it to:

**NSS,
25 Red Lion Square,
London WC1R 4RL**

Name(s):

Address:

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Telephone number:

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Occupation:

(Optional but appreciated)

I accept the principles and objects shown in this booklet and apply for membership.

Signature:

Date:

I enclose my cheque/postal order for:

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Total enclosed:

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Please return completed form to:

**National Secular Society,
25 Red Lion Square,
London WC1R 4RL**

The Society's Principles & Objects:

1. Secularism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge and human effort should be directed wholly towards its improvement.
2. It asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.
3. Secularism affirms that progress is possible only on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised state.
4. Affirming that morality is social in origin and application, Secularism aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.
5. Secularism demands the complete separation of Church and State and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations.
6. It seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace, to further common cultural interests and to develop the freedom and dignity of mankind.

The NSS is certainly vigorous in its opposition to the forces of superstition, obscurantism, and illiberalism; but that is merely another way of looking at its support for liberal causes. When it campaigns against censorship, it is campaigning for freedom of expression; when it campaigns against faith schools, it is campaigning for educational impartiality; and when it campaigns against any of the social and fiscal survivals of religious privilege, it is campaigning for equality in a pluralist society.

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