

Bulletin

national
secular
society

Issue 80 Spring 2022

challenging religious privilege

BISHOPS RALLY AGAINST ASSISTED DYING REFORM

**"UNANIMITY" AMONG BISHOPS
IN LORDS AGAINST LEGALISATION,
SAYS JUSTIN WELBY**

**POLLS REVEAL STRONG PUBLIC
SUPPORT FOR CHANGING THE LAW**

**NSS: ILLUSTRATES NEED TO
SCRAP THE BISHOPS' BENCH**

ALSO IN THIS EDITION:

How Christian privilege
is "baked in" to the
armed forces

Bradlaugh's grave
restored to its
former glory



Secularism is essential for individual rights and freedoms

Religious leaders have long used their privileged position within the political establishment to undermine individual freedoms and prevent progressive change.

And throughout its history, the National Secular Society has supported the principles of autonomy and personal dignity in the face of religious opposition. These principles are behind our support for an individual's right to an assisted death, with appropriate patient safeguards.

The assisted dying debate encapsulates the injustice of religion having undue influence over public policy.

Religious leaders have been lobbying to block proposals that the British public overwhelmingly support. They are of course at liberty to do this. But bishops shouldn't have their own bench in the House of Lords – with all the voting rights and special privileges that entails – to make their case.

Separating governance from religion,

the task at the heart of our mission, is an important democratic principle – and vital to the preservation of individual rights.

Its necessity is also made clear by compulsory worship in schools, also covered in this Bulletin. All children and young people should enjoy freedom from state imposed religious observation. Mandating worship by law in schools is archaic, inappropriate, and wholly incompatible with freedom

"Separating governance from religion, the task at the heart of our mission, is an important democratic principle – and vital to the preservation of individual rights."

of religion or belief. But the government is refusing to support even very limited legislation, which would require non-faith schools in England to hold inclusive assemblies rather than holding daily acts of Christian worship.

The relationship between church and state, and the role of religion in publicly funded education, are clearly barriers

to sensible reform on this and many other issues involving the nation's schools.

The Christian lobby has powerful friends in government – and there are concerning signs that the current government favours an even more robust role for religion in public life.

But seeking to increase religion's public role in a society so religiously diverse and largely secularised is absurd – and will inevitably lead to a rolling back of progress on equal rights.

That's why your membership is so important.

Only with your support can we highlight and challenge religious privilege – and champion your right to live your life without other people's religious beliefs and practices being imposed on you. A secular democracy is the foundation of a free, fair and equal society. Throughout this edition you'll find out how we're working to achieve that.

Welcome protections for free expression

There was encouraging news for our work to protect free speech, as the Law Commission recommended extending a protection for freedom of expression in hate crime legislation.

In a report on hate crime law, the commission warned that criticism of cultural practices could be caught under laws criminalising the 'stirring up' of racial hatred.

This echoed a warning we'd made in response to a consultation on the subject.

The commission said protections that currently apply to the discussion and criticism of religious practices should be extended to cover cultural practices.

In response to further concerns we'd raised, the commission also said stirring up hatred offences involved "a much higher threshold" than something being considered blasphemous or offensive. We've welcomed this clarification.

Government position on 'Islamophobia'

Elsewhere a government minister warned that the term 'Islamophobia' has been used to silence opinions during a House of Lords debate.

Stephen Greenhalgh reiterated the government's rejection of a parliamentary group's definition of 'Islamophobia'. We've cautioned against the adoption of this definition since it was proposed in 2018, warning that it risks infringing on free speech.

"The term 'Islamophobia' is used as a heckler's veto to shut down alternative opinions. We need to come up with a way forward that does not compromise free speech."

Stephen Greenhalgh, government minister



Bishops unite to block legalisation of assisted dying

The 26 Anglican bishops who represent the Church of England in the House of Lords have united to oppose the legalisation of assisted dying for terminally ill people.

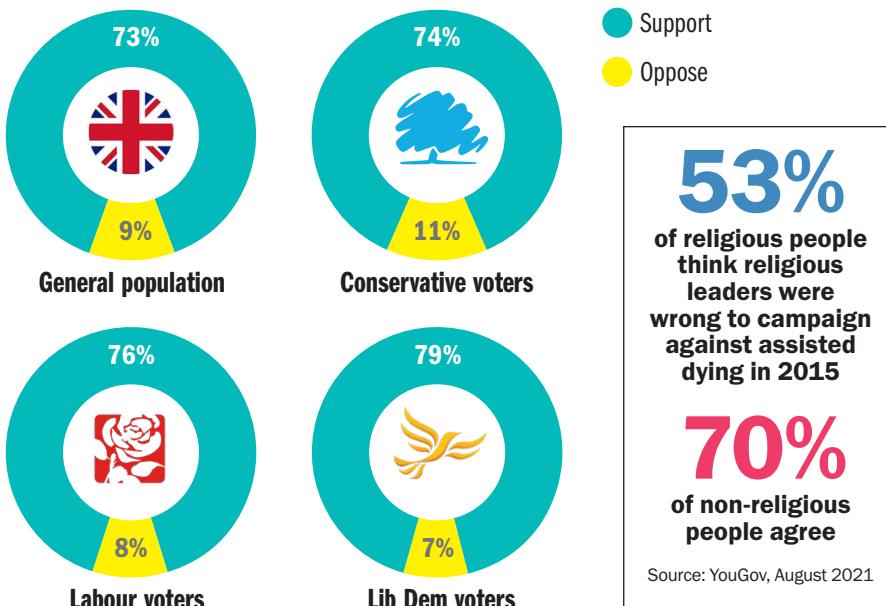
The bishops' bench is opposing a bill from crossbench peer Molly Meacher, which would allow terminally ill, mentally competent adults in their last six months of life to choose an assisted death.

Under Baroness Meacher's bill, two independent doctors and a High Court judge would have to assess each request for an assisted death. And legalisation would not extend to those facing intolerable suffering who were not terminally ill – as it does, for example, in Canada.



SUPPORT FOR ALLOWING TERMINALLY ILL PEOPLE THE CHOICE OF AN ASSISTED DEATH

Source: YouGov, August 2021



Polls consistently find very strong public support for changing the law in the way the bill proposes – including majorities among both religious and non-religious people.

Religious objections

During the bill's second reading in the Lords in October, the archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said the bishops' bench was united in opposition to legalisation.

Several other bishops spoke out against the bill – including Martin Warner, the bishop of Chichester, who said: "In the Christian view, God does not inflict evil on people."

The former archbishop of York John Sentamu, who now has a life seat as a

crossbench peer, also expressed opposition.

And several other lords invoked religious objections. Michael Farmer, an evangelical Christian and major Conservative Party donor appointed to the House of Lords in 2014, accused the bill of "denying God and denying eternity". Another Conservative, Ranbir Singh Suri, cited Sikh religious texts as he said: "We have to accept the will of almighty God."

Support for the bill

Several of the bill's supporters stressed that it would not compel those with religious or other objections to assisted dying to take part in the process.

Some also spoke of religious reasons for supporting the bill. The former archbishop of Canterbury George Carey was among those who supported it, accusing the bishops of being "out of step" with both the public and the C of E's own membership.

The bill passed its second reading in the Lords, but it is unlikely to become law without government backing.

Scrap the bishops' bench

The bishops' stance again shows the harm caused by reserving seats in the legislature for religious representatives. It's long past time to scrap the bishops' bench.

You can show support for our campaign for a secular legislature, and help to make the case, by visiting our campaign page: secularism.org.uk/scrap-bishops-bench.

NSS backs proposals for assisted dying law in Scotland

Meanwhile we've backed proposals to allow competent adults who are terminally ill the choice of assisted dying in Scotland.

We welcomed plans for a bill in response to a consultation from Liberal Democrat MSP Liam McArthur in November.

We also warned that religious leaders' views are over-represented in debates on assisted dying.

Exposing lack of transparency in school admissions

In October we urged the government to ensure transparency over religious discrimination in school admissions in England.

We told the Department for Education that information on whether schools have religiously selective oversubscription criteria should be included on a government database.

We warned that information on the Get Information About Schools (GIAS) service, which is widely used to provide data on schools, could mislead parents.

The service includes information on whether schools' admissions policies are "selective" or "non-selective" – but

this refers only to academically selective admissions, which are far outnumbered by religious selection.

DfE's lack of interest

But in response to a question in the House of Lords in November Diana Barran, the minister responsible for faith schools, appeared uninterested in the outcome.

She said the government had no plans to collect information on the number of schools that include faith-based criteria in their admissions arrangements.

And the DfE had already admitted it had no estimate of how many

children are effectively forced into faith schools, or left unable to attend their local school because of religious discrimination.

Families seeking school places should have clarity over the barriers they may face. The public should know how far discrimination reaches in admissions to publicly-funded schools.

And it's long past time to put an end to the shameful practice of religious discrimination in school admissions. All schools should be equally welcoming to all children – regardless of their families' religious backgrounds.



Secular schooling under threat in Wigan

We're pushing back against plans that could see a secular primary school close in Wigan – in an area where families already face significant difficulty accessing non-faith based schooling.

Wigan Council has outlined plans to reduce surplus places in the Abram area, which could see either a community school or a Catholic school close.

Closing the community school – Abram Bryn Gates School – would leave many families with no choice but a faith school.

In response to a consultation we warned that this could be unlawful, as it could see the council breach its obligation to provide pupils with a suitable education.

Restrictions on secular schooling

Our research has found that there are already significant restrictions on families' ability to choose a non-faith based education in 81% of postcodes in Wigan.

In the Abram ward, where Abram Bryn Gates is based, the figure is 90%. It would approach 100% if the school closes, as five of its nearest six schools are faith-based.

Closure of Wigan primary school may break the law, council is cautioned

The closure of a community school in Wigan may be unlawful, the National Secular Society has warned.

Our warning was featured in *Wigan Today*

NSS prompts change in faith school's admissions policy

An adjudicator has told a state-funded Orthodox Jewish school in north London to change its admissions policy after we raised concerns. We alerted the Office of the Schools Adjudicator to an application form which asked for pupils' ethnic background, and listed only white ethnicities as possible answers.

We welcomed plans from Suffolk County Council which would end religious selection in schools where it is the admissions authority.

Bill to reform collective worship law progresses in parliament

A bill which would end the duty on non-faith schools in England to hold Christian acts of worship has progressed in parliament.

The Education (Assemblies) Bill, which has been proposed by Liberal Democrat peer Lorely Burt (*pictured*), has cleared the House of Lords and a first reading in the Commons.

We briefed peers in support of the bill throughout its passage through the Lords. We're briefing MPs, and urging supporters to write to their MPs.

Under the bill:

- Schools would not be required to organise compulsory acts of religious observance, but pupils could opt into voluntary acts of worship if they wish.
- Non-religious schools would be required to provide assemblies that develop the “spiritual, moral, social and cultural education” of pupils, regardless of religion or belief.
- Faith schools would still be able to hold collective worship, but would

“Are not all children entitled to assemblies that include them and do not make them feel like outsiders?”

Lorely Burt, introducing the bill in the Lords



© The Liberal Democrats [CC BY-SA 4.0]

be required to provide a meaningful alternative for withdrawn pupils.

Schools in England and Wales are currently required to hold daily acts of collective worship which are “wholly or mainly of a Christian character”.

This requirement has long been an

anachronism, as many schools have ignored it with the tacit acceptance of the Department for Education and Ofsted. But alarmingly, comments from ministers last year suggested the potential for a tightening of enforcement.

The bill is helpful but limited, and should just be a first step towards the end of collective worship in all schools. But the government is opposing it – which makes it unlikely to become law.

“The government has no business mandating worship in schools, and schools have no business coercing religious observance from pupils.”

Our head of education Alastair Lichten responds to the bill's progress

Assemblies for All

Teachers looking for ideas for secular, inclusive assemblies may be inspired by the recently-published book *Assemblies for All*, by Paul Stanley.

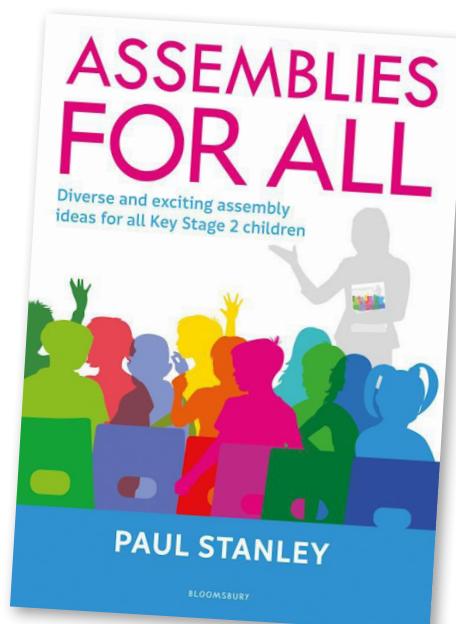
Paul, who died at the age of 54 in September 2019, ran many school assemblies during his career, including as head of a Church of England school.

He took the firm view that schools were not religious communities, or places of worship, and used his assemblies to gather the school community together to reflect on significant issues in an inclusive way.

The book is published by Bloomsbury and costs £24.99. Our website also has advice for parents, pupils and teachers seeking an inclusive alternative to collective worship.

“Paul resented the implication and the expectation that he should be some kind of religious leader when he stood in front of the children for a whole school assembly... Positive messages are emphasised, and global human issues are explored, in thought-provoking ways – and without wedging in any deity.”

Sue Garratt, Paul Stanley's widow, on his book





Failing independent faith schools and the threat to children's rights

Teaching creationism in science lessons. Refusing to teach about reproduction or sex education. Censoring resources – or failing to enter pupils for GCSEs because school leaders aren't allowed to censor exam papers. Giving little time to secular subjects in the curriculum.

These are just some of the failings which have emerged at independent faith schools in England in recent years.

In December it emerged that a quarter of non-association independent faith schools – independent faith schools which are inspected by Ofsted – had failed to meet standards. There were particularly alarming trends in independent Jewish schools, with 55% of them failing.

And in recent months, several damning Ofsted reports have illustrated these concerns.

The latest failings

An Orthodox Jewish girls' school in the Stamford Hill area of London was teaching nothing about sex education or reproduction – even in GCSE Science, where reproduction is part of the exam.

A few miles away in Barnet, leaders at an Orthodox Jewish boys' school gave "little" of the timetable to secular subjects. Ofsted's inspectors failed the school for the third consecutive time.

Another school was rated inadequate for a fourth consecutive time, as pupils were only "knowledgeable about their own community". Another school

SOME OF THE LATEST OFFENDERS:

TALMUD TORAH YETEV LEV, LONDON: has failed four inspections in a row; pupils "not well prepared for life in modern Britain"

TALMUD TORAH TOLDOS YAKOV YOSEF, LONDON: has failed three inspections in a row; "narrow" secular curriculum

BEIS RUCHEL D'SATMAR LONDON: refuses to teach about reproduction or sex education

refused to teach biology past year 8.

And meanwhile the government banned two more schools from admitting new pupils after inspectors identified serious and persistent failings.

Schools with other religious affiliations have also failed in recent years. Muslim schools in Birmingham and Greater Manchester have been found illegally segregating children

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The government's options to tackle failing independent schools include:

- **Issue a warning notice**, requiring a school to improve
- **Issue a statutory notice**, prompting tight monitoring and the threat of deregistration
- **Bar a school from admitting new pupils**
- **Deregister a school**, so it can no longer operate legally, and ensure alternative education is provided for children affected

by sex. A Christian school in Berkshire said on its website that "science is taught from the Biblical perspective of creation".

Defending children's rights

These schools are failing the children they are charged with educating.

We've long supported standards which defend the educational rights of children within independent schools, and consistent accountability for schools regardless of their religious ethos. In some cases, we've raised the persistent failings of independent faith schools with the Department for Education – and the DfE has taken firmer action in response.

And we're continuing to push ministers to defend children's fundamental right to an education worth the name.

■ Last year a report from Jewish counter-extremism group Nahamu highlighted the impact of a lack of relationships and sex education in Orthodox Jewish schools. See our summer 2021 Bulletin for more details.

OTHER EDUCATION CAMPAIGNING

■ We backed bills calling on Northern Ireland's government to actively promote integrated education, and to extend protections against religious discrimination to teachers, in submissions to NI's education select committee.

■ We warned that religious objections could restrict the use of period products in schools, in light of DfE guidance for a period product scheme. The guidance says schools should "be aware of religious and cultural beliefs around tampons when considering which products to buy" and "consider

the views of parents and carers before distributing tampons to learners".

■ We urged the government to ensure that all pupils have equal access to in-school vaccination after a Hindu academy chain blocked delivery of flu vaccinations in its schools.

Bradlaugh's grave restored to its former glory

In October we took part in a ceremony to mark the unveiling of a new bust of NSS founder Charles Bradlaugh at his grave, at Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey.

The event came amid a fundraising appeal to restore the grave, which fell into disrepair after parts were stolen and vandalised in the 20th century.

Supporters of the appeal, the mayor of Woking and several of Bradlaugh's descendants were among the attendees.

We're working with the cemetery to restore the grave, which will feature an information panel with details of Bradlaugh's life and achievements.

Bradlaugh's life

Bradlaugh founded the NSS in 1866 and faced a prolonged struggle to enter parliament as an MP in the 1880s, as he was barred from taking his seat because of his atheist beliefs.

He finally took his place in parliament in 1886. His campaign led to a change in the law, which still gives all MPs the right to make a secular affirmation rather than swear a religious oath today.

He was also prosecuted after publishing rudimentary information about birth control, and he made the case for the end of the blasphemy law and the disestablishment of the Church of England.

Our thanks to all our members who generously donated to fund the appeal.

"A man of the people, and a man for the people."

Brookwood Cemetery Society chair Kim Lowe on Bradlaugh

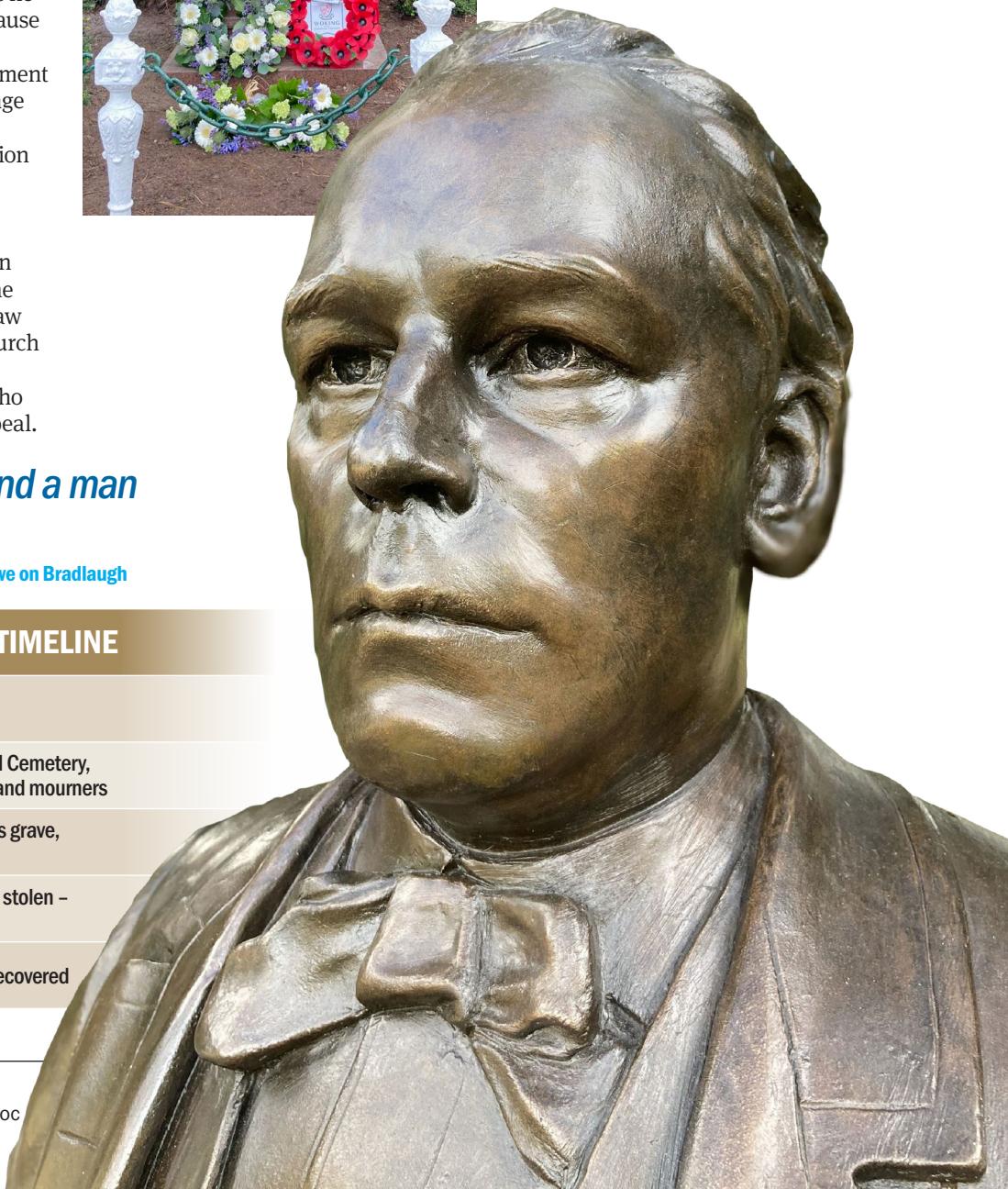


"Bradlaugh was the greatest radical politician of his era. The principles of equality, freedom and secularism he championed are more relevant than ever today."

Our CEO Stephen Evans

"The last wreath to be added was from the Northampton deputation... The message on it was four simple words: 'Brave, Honest, Incorruptible, Thorough.'"

A passage on Bradlaugh's funeral, from Bryan Niblett's biography *Dare To Stand Alone*, read by our historian Bob Forder



BRADLAUGH'S GRAVE: A TIMELINE

30 January 1891:	Bradlaugh dies, aged 57
3 February 1891:	Funeral held at Brookwood Cemetery, attended by several thousand mourners
1893:	Monument erected over his grave, including bronze bust
1938:	Grave vandalised and bust stolen – and later recovered
1968:	Bust stolen – never to be recovered

Warning against religious loopholes on conversion therapy

We've warned that loopholes for religious groups could leave some vulnerable people unprotected by government plans to ban 'conversion therapy'.

In a letter to Liz Truss, the minister for women and equalities, we sought clarity over proposals to allow some forms of 'therapy' where adults "agree by choice" to undertake them.

We warned that the idea of consent could be exploited – particularly where individuals have been raised in insular religious households or communities.

We also asked if adults who have been raised in fundamentalist and insular religious communities, with little exposure to other views or people from outside their communities, would be

considered vulnerable.

The current proposals would ban 'talking' conversion therapy on under 18s and vulnerable adults.

Private prayer

The proposals would also not include "private prayer" in the scope of the ban.

We warned that religious groups could exploit this, and asked whether 'therapies' performed in religious settings or using religious rituals would be included in the law.

Charities' support for conversion therapy

We also said proposals designed to ensure charities don't support conversion therapy represented a welcome step, but

were "not robust enough".

The proposals appear to permit organisations supporting 'consensual' forms of conversion therapy to continue to operate as charities.

Charities are legally required to serve a public benefit. In recent years we've raised concerns that organisations promoting conversion therapy have been given charitable status, despite causing harm.

In response to the consultation we also welcomed the government's stated intention to ensure that banning conversion therapy will not result in interference for professionals providing legitimate support for those who may be questioning if they are LGBT.

College bans LGBT relationships

The higher education regulator will investigate a theological college which discriminates against LGBT+ students after we raised its case.

We notified the Office for Students that Moorlands College's apparent discrimination against students with characteristics protected by equality law may breach the conditions of its registration.

The college's registration allows it to access public funds and charge tuition fees at the full rate.

"Sexual misconduct"

The college's code of conduct forbids same-sex relationships, which is potentially in breach of the Equality Act. The code includes a non-exhaustive list of transgressions which can lead to disciplinary action. These include "sexual misconduct as understood in the classic Evangelical tradition of the

college's founding documents", such as "sexual intercourse outside of marriage".

The disciplinary actions listed in the code include expulsion from the college.

The code also discriminates against individuals of different religions and beliefs, including those of different denominations of Christianity, and unmarried mothers.

"God is very straight talking on these questions. He says homosexual activity is not his will. It is sin. It is not a human right."

A sermon by Moorlands College's director of academic quality in 2020



French church abuse crisis: pope and state look away



By NSS president
Keith Porteous Wood

appointed by the church.

The report generated headlines around the world. These prompted the arch-conservative Catholic Institute of Paris to write to the pope to trash CIASE's estimate of the numbers and its most positive recommendation: that references to cCSA in the confessional be exempted from confidentiality imposed by canon law.

The institute's priority appears to be protecting the church's reputation and assets. The pope was only too happy to oblige, cancelling an audience already announced for CIASE to present its report. He said the report risked "confusing the way of seeing the problem 70 years ago with the way of seeing now".

The two and a half years' work of CIASE's multi-disciplinary team has been largely squandered. While the French bishops accepted the report, they remain hesitant to accept moral or financial responsibility to compensate victims fairly, far less to report, as French law requires, their knowledge of CSA.

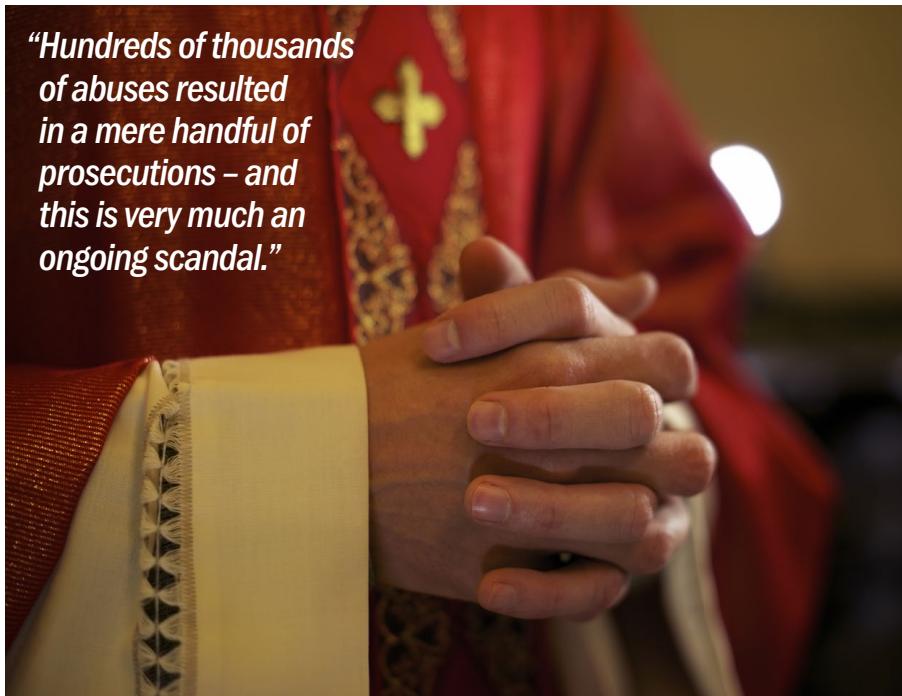
Indeed the president of the French Bishops' Conference publicly asserted

Since 1950 there have been at least 330,000 victims of clerical child sexual abuse (cCSA) in the French Catholic Church.

This is the verdict of a newly published report from CIASE,

a commission

"Hundreds of thousands of abuses resulted in a mere handful of prosecutions – and this is very much an ongoing scandal."



Diego Cervo/Shutterstock.com

that the confidentiality of the confessional prevailed over French law. When President Macron summoned him to France's Home Office, to explain this, his "defence" was that he had spoken "clumsily". Hopefully this wasn't code for "That remains the reality, but I shouldn't have said so".

Hundreds of thousands of abuses resulted in a mere handful of prosecutions – and this is very much an ongoing scandal. Credible accusations of failure to report were recently made against 25 bishops, but did not result in any investigations or prosecutions.

Neither house of parliament instituted a statutory inquiry into CSA as other

countries have, nor has the report yet prompted interest in one. One should be instituted and vested with powers of summons and evidence discovery. It should examine the effectiveness and operation of CSA and reporting laws and how they could be improved. It is also vital to investigate the almost total failure of prosecutors to pursue or report cases of cCSA.

France prides itself on its secularism. But on child abuse, more than two centuries on from the revolution, the church remains above the law.

Keith Porteous Wood was consulted by the president of CIASE during its evidence gathering process.

UN warning over Catholic Church's influence in Poland

A UN committee warned that the Catholic Church's influence was furthering discrimination, abuse and homophobia in Poland – after we raised concerns over the church's political influence.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has said it's "concerned" about the church's role in public education, in a periodic report on children's rights in Poland.

It recommended that Poland should:

- Ensure all cases of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church are "reported, investigated and prosecuted"
- Respect children's right to "freedom of thought, conscience and religion in education"
- Promote "a culture of equality and inclusion" in schools
- Address homophobic behaviour from students and teachers "in the context of religion classes".

We previously submitted evidence to the committee urging it to put pressure on Poland to reform religious education, protect LGBT children and hold the Catholic Church accountable for its safeguarding failures. (*See the spring 2021 Bulletin for more*).

We're encouraged by how far the committee has taken our submission on board, and pressure is now mounting on the Polish government to review its close relationship with the church.

CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE IN THE ARMED FORCES “BAKED IN AT THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL”

“Pro-Christian bias is so hard wired into the British military, that it has become an inclusivity blind-spot.”

This is the view of Laurence Quinn, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Royal Engineers who served for 35 years.

While he was a serving officer, he came to consider some of the practices which the army took for granted. He found that Christianity was “part of the wallpaper” and “baked in at the most fundamental level”, and worked in to many aspects of everyday life. In 2016 this led him to write a report on the army’s blind spot towards those with no religion.

He identified three main areas to address. Christian rituals and prayers are central to collective symbolic acts, including remembrance. Chaplains come from only eight Christian ‘sending churches’; the army has appointed representatives of other religious traditions, but there is no non-religious

equivalent. And the armed forces’ language and culture reflect their institutional religiosity.

In October Quinn published an update on his 2016 report. And the following month, in an interview for our podcast, he argued that the armed forces should be open to change.

Signs of progress...

There have since been some signs of progress. Until recently the queen’s regulations effectively made it impossible for atheists to become commanding officers. They also required soldiers to get permission to change religion, and said the “reverent observance” of religion in the army was of the “highest importance”.

But these unfair and illiberal requirements were removed in 2019 following long campaigning efforts from armed forces members.

“There’s no need in the Geneva Convention to give your religious affiliation. In fact it’s protected by GDPR. And yet we hand this information over to any possible captor. I know one Jewish soldier who didn’t dare put ‘Jew’ on his ID disc.”

ON ID DISCS WHICH SOLDIERS WEAR, AND WHICH INCLUDE DETAILS OF THEIR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

“Only Christians from a select group of sending churches can be chaplains in regular army units... There’s absolutely no good military operational reason why that should be the case.”

ON CHAPLAINCY

...But there’s far more to do

But the progress so far is tentative at best. For example, the regulations have been updated to say soldiers may not be compelled to attend acts of religious observance against their wishes. But another clause says commanders may order a parade that includes a religious service, which soldiers are expected to attend.

Christianity still holds a disproportionate sway over an increasingly irreligious and religiously diverse army.

In Laurence Quinn’s words, it’s time to “put on a fresh pair of eyes” and look again at the army’s attitude to including non-religious people.

And that should also prompt wider questions over the relationship between religion and state in Britain.

“Many soldiers would stand on parade in respectful silence while a Christian ceremony is going on. I felt distinctly not included in my unit’s remembrance of its fallen comrades, and I’m not the only person who felt that way.”

ON REMEMBRANCE



Listen to episode 60 of our podcast: Atheists in foxholes – religion and the army, with Laurence Quinn



Public backs labelling of non-stun meat

We've called for action to end non-stun slaughter, or to at least empower consumers to avoid non-stun meat – amid polling which suggests widespread public support for our position.

We made the call in response to a consultation from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on plans to improve information about animal welfare in food labelling.

The plans would see the introduction of mandatory labelling to indicate the slaughter method for meat, including meat from animals slaughtered without stunning for halal and kosher products.

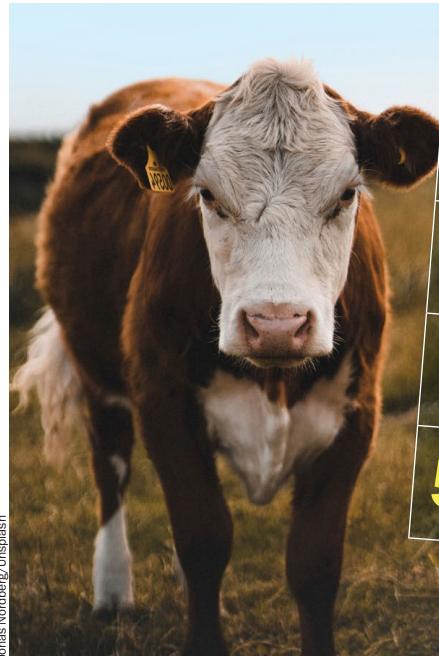
Animal welfare legislation requires animals to be stunned before slaughter to minimise suffering – but with an exemption for religious communities to meet Jewish and Muslim religious dietary preferences.

We said religious exemptions which allow non-stun slaughter should be removed, and short of that labelling requirements should be introduced to enable consumers to make informed decisions.

Widespread public support

Meanwhile polling from Censuswide, which we commissioned, showed widespread support among the UK public for action on non-stun slaughter.

The polling also found that many people are unaware that there is no



"Animal welfare should not be undermined by religious concerns."
Our response to the government's consultation

requirement for non-stun meat to be labelled.

Our research has previously found that non-stun meat is widely sold without labelling, including in supermarkets, and provided in schools – often with no alternative meat option.



Source: Censuswide

**CONSUMERS WANT LABELS ON MEAT
AND DAIRY PRODUCTS DETAILING
ANIMAL WELFARE**

Shoppers want animal welfare labels on meat

Our survey findings were reported in *The Times* and *The Independent*

Non-stun meat served in parliament

We revealed that meat from animals which has not been stunned before slaughter is being served in parliament.

In response to our queries, the House of Commons said halal and kosher meals which it sells contain meat from animals which are not pre-stunned before slaughter.

Parliament rolled out a new halal and kosher menu in October.

Parliament accused of encouraging animal suffering over introduction of halal and kosher meals

Our CEO Stephen Evans and a spokesperson for Compassion in World Farming criticised parliament's policy in *The Mirror*

OTHER CAMPAIGNING AND NEWS

■ We reported a newly registered Islamic charity that carried advice on when and how to beat women on its website to the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

■ We questioned a decision from Scotland's charity regulator to register an anti-abortion 'pregnancy support service' that has previously misled women.

■ New figures revealed that more than £750m of public money had been given to the Church of England over the last five years – despite its own investments topping £10bn.

■ We joined organisations and individuals from around the world in calling for the release of Soheil Arabi, an Iranian blogger imprisoned for blasphemy.

■ We welcomed a vote from councillors in Congleton in Cheshire to adopt a new civic protocol which will allow for secular council meetings. We provided advice to the councillor who proposed the protocol during the drafting process.

Memoirs of a former NSS president

"At the beginning of this story I, along with every other gay man in the country, was a sexual outlaw.... Six decades later, I am about to exercise my option to be married to my male partner."

This is the remarkable story told in the memoirs of our former president, Terry Sanderson, which have just been published in revised and expanded form in the new book *The Reluctant Gay Activist*.

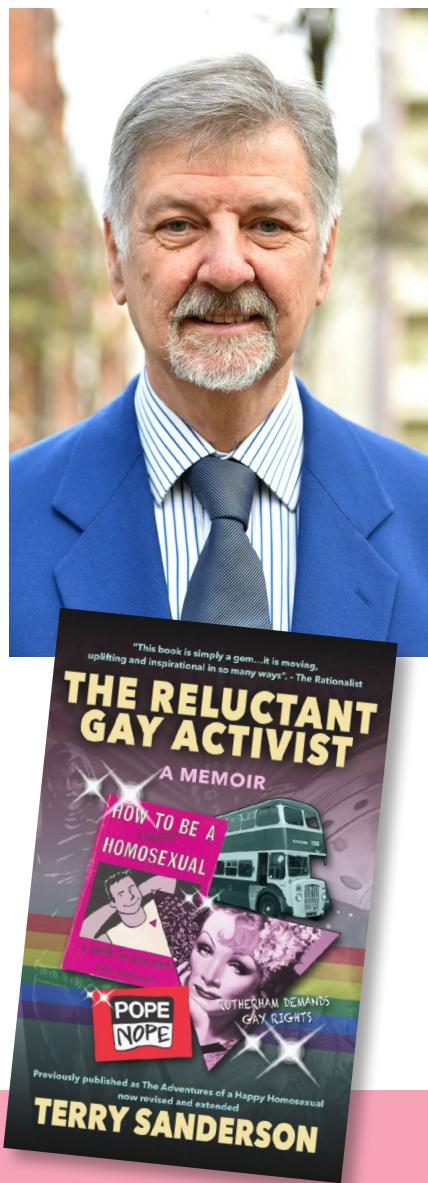
"Religion is the greatest opponent of justice for homosexuals. When laws are made according to religious principles... homosexuals become criminalised, persecuted and in constant peril."

Terry Sanderson

The book takes readers through Terry's realisation that he was gay; the blatant and institutionalised discrimination he faced, particularly at a young age; and his recognition of secularism's value in protecting gay rights.

It revisits NSS campaigns against blasphemy laws and religious exemptions to equality law, and events such as the protest against Pope Benedict's state visit in 2010.

You can read a response to the book on the opinion page of our website, and you can buy the book on Amazon (paperback price £6.99).



WIN THE BOOK

We're giving away one copy of Terry Sanderson's book *The Reluctant Gay Activist*.

For a chance to win, answer the following question:

In which year did the law which permitted homosexual acts between two consenting adults in England and Wales pass?

Send your answers to admin@secularism.org.uk. Please use the subject line "Terry Sanderson book competition".

AGM summary

Many thanks to members who virtually attended our online AGM in November. At the AGM we welcomed Mike Harley, our new treasurer, and Eoin Carter to council.

President Keith Porteous Wood and vice-presidents Josephine Macintosh and Richard Scorer were all re-elected as were council members Judy Audaer and Sadikur Rahman.

Afonso Reis e Sousa and Peter Revell retired from council at the AGM. We thank them for their long service and valuable contributions to the NSS.

We look forward to holding the 2022 AGM in person.

WHY I SUPPORT THE NSS

"Politics has become so polarised in a relatively short space of time. In this feverish atmosphere, extreme versions of religion make things worse, which is why secularism is more essential than ever."

"The right not to have a religion is vital in democratic societies, something some politicians are in danger of forgetting. That's why I support the National Secular Society and its campaigns, particularly for secular education."

JOAN SMITH, journalist and author



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