

Ep 53: Religion and LGBT rights: fifty years of change

Full shownotes and subscriber information: <https://www.secularism.org.uk/podcast/2021/07/ep-53>

0:00:07.680,0:00:12.720

"Certainly the church refuses to accept same-sex marriage.

and entrenched views. In wider society attitudes

0:00:12.720,0:00:16.880

It won't even bless same-sex relationships. It will bless

0:00:59.920,0:01:03.600

to sexualities other than heterosexuality have shifted over the last five decades.

0:00:16.880,0:00:22.560

dogs and cats, warships and tanks but it won't bless loving same-sex couples."

0:01:04.240,0:01:08.480

Throughout this time, however, and indeed for centuries before that it has always been

0:00:26.880,0:00:31.360

You're listening to Episode 53 of the National Secular Society podcast produced by Emma Park

0:01:08.480,0:01:12.960

religious organisations of one sort or another that have led the opposition to greater equality.

0:00:31.360,0:00:36.480

(EP). It is hard to think that nearly 55 years ago having a love affair with someone of the same sex

0:01:13.920,0:01:18.720

In this Episode I'm very pleased to welcome two seasoned LGBT activists to talk about their

0:00:36.480,0:00:42.480

as yourself was a criminal offence; or that the age of consent for gay sex was only reduced to 16

0:01:18.720,0:01:24.000

experiences over the years. My first guest, Peter Tatchell (PT) has been campaigning for gay rights

0:00:42.480,0:00:48.320

in 2001; or that same-sex marriage was only permitted by law in England, Wales and Scotland

0:01:24.000,0:01:29.760

and public acceptance since 1967. During that time he has suffered numerous violent assaults,

0:00:48.320,0:00:54.400

in 2014; and in Northern Ireland not till last year. The history of LGBT rights in the UK has

0:01:29.760,0:01:35.200

arrests, attacks on his home and death threats.

0:00:54.400,0:00:59.920

involved persistent struggles against prejudice

Since 2011 he has directed the Peter Tatchell

0:01:35.200,0:01:39.600

foundation which campaigns for human rights

around the world. His story has been told in the

0:01:39.600,0:01:44.640
documentary 'Hating Peter Tatchell' released this year on Netflix. I will be talking to Peter about

0:01:44.640,0:01:49.360
what it was like to be gay in Britain in the 70s 80s and 90s and about some of his most memorable

0:01:49.360,0:01:54.160
campaigns. We will also be discussing the extent to which different religious organisations

0:01:54.160,0:02:00.320
continue to oppose LGBT equality today both in Britain and around the world. My second guest,

0:02:00.320,0:02:04.320
Terry Sanderson (TS), started campaigning for gay rights just two years after Peter Tatchell in

0:02:04.320,0:02:11.600
1969. Terry joined the National Secular Society in the 1990s and was its President from 2006 to 2017.

0:02:12.160,0:02:16.160
He will be talking to me about the resistance to LGBT equality which he has encountered from

0:02:16.160,0:02:20.880
religious organisations over the years and the continuing role of the NSS in challenging them.

0:02:21.520,0:02:25.840
Finally I will be asking Terry to what extent

it is possible to be both gay and religious.

0:02:28.600,0:02:34.720
(EP): Peter Tatchell, welcome to the podcast. (PT): It's a great pleasure to join you. (EP):

0:02:34.720,0:02:40.000
Well thank you for being here. So let's start with your long experience in campaigning. You've

0:02:40.000,0:02:45.120
been campaigning for 54 years now. What was it like to be gay in Britain when you started

0:02:45.120,0:02:52.240
campaigning? (PT) Well I think if anyone's seen the new Netflix documentary about my life, 'Hating

0:02:52.240,0:02:58.160
Peter Tatchell' you will see that I did begin at a very very young age, when I was still at school.

0:02:59.360,0:03:05.040
But when I came from Australia to London in 1971, aged 19,

0:03:06.080,0:03:13.520
I was still a criminal. There had been a partial limited decriminalisation of male homosexuality

0:03:13.520,0:03:18.160
but only in England and Wales, not in Scotland or Northern Ireland

0:03:18.160,0:03:26.400
and only if both men were age 21 or over. So I was still two years below the lawful age of consent

0:03:26.960,0:03:32.720
and I could face a sentence of up to two

years in prison for a consenting relationship.

0:03:34.160,0:03:41.600

At the same time there was very widespread police harassment of gay bars, clubs and even private

0:03:41.600,0:03:48.400

parties. There were no 'out' public figures. The whole of society was pretty much against us:

0:03:49.280,0:03:57.120

the government, the judiciary, the police, the media, the education system, the church - we were

0:03:57.120,0:04:03.840

really with our backs against the wall, you know, fighting for our basic fundamental human rights

0:04:03.840,0:04:11.760

with every social institution ranged against us. So it was a big big challenge and of course

0:04:12.560,0:04:18.320

religiously motivated people were in the forefront of the attacks upon our community

0:04:19.040,0:04:28.400

and the attempts to ensure that we did NOT get equal rights so for decades in the 1970s,

0:04:29.040,0:04:36.080

80s and right to the 1990s you couldn't even get a parliamentary debate about LGBT+ equality

0:04:36.720,0:04:43.760

because MPs thought it was so disgusting and many of these MPs were influenced by religion

0:04:44.640,0:04:49.520

in terms of the religious opposition. (EP): So in terms of those decades 70s, 80s and 90s are there

0:04:49.520,0:04:56.080

any particular examples that stand out in your memory? (PT): Well of course one of the really big

0:04:56.080,0:05:05.200

religious campaigns of the early 1970s was by Mary Whitehouse and her 'Festival of Light'. This was a

0:05:05.200,0:05:11.360

Christian-led campaign against what they called "moral pollution" and in particular they opposed

0:05:11.360,0:05:17.440

abortion, homosexuality and pornography. They said these were modern evils that were

0:05:17.440,0:05:24.000

destroying British life, that were a threat to our civilisation and one of the things

0:05:24.000,0:05:30.960

that 'The Festival of Light' really opposed very strongly was any rights for LGBT+ plus people.

0:05:32.240,0:05:37.040

Some of them wanted to roll back the partial limited decriminalisation

0:05:37.040,0:05:44.880

of 1967. Others were egging on the police to use the remaining laws to crack down

0:05:44.880,0:05:52.320

on our community with even greater ferocity. There were attacks upon gay organisations

0:05:52.320,0:05:56.480

like 'The Gay Liberation Front' and the 'Campaign for Homosexual Equality'.

0:05:57.520,0:06:04.240

There were attacks on the newly formed gay media, gay news. There are attacks upon

0:06:05.360,0:06:09.680

LGBT counseling and advice services which they said were corrupting the nation.

0:06:10.400,0:06:17.600

So it was a big tough battle against these religious figures who had a lot of public support

0:06:18.160,0:06:24.880

and a lot of political support. Lots of members of Parliament were backing 'The Festival of Light'

0:06:24.880,0:06:30.400

and the kinds of ideas that it espoused. (EP): What eventually do you think changed

0:06:30.400,0:06:35.680

these attitudes? Was it just society in general becoming more liberal towards the 1990s and then

0:06:35.680,0:06:43.040

the early 2000s? (PT): There's no doubt in my mind that it was only because of the campaigning

0:06:43.040,0:06:53.040

of LGBT+ organisations and individuals that things began to change. If we just sat back and allowed

0:06:53.600,0:07:00.720

straight society to walk all over us we would have had to wait many many more years to secure equal

0:07:00.720,0:07:08.160

rights. There's a very clear correlation between the campaigns and eventual change. So for example

0:07:08.720,0:07:16.000

in the 1990s I was involved with the LGBT+ direct action group outrage. And we had

0:07:16.800,0:07:24.640

a series of campaigns targeting every single anti-LGBT+ law you know we go for one

0:07:24.640,0:07:33.520

then another then another. And so on and through our very spectacular, daring, controversial

0:07:33.520,0:07:39.600

and sometimes quite fun and entertaining protests we got a lot of media coverage.

0:07:40.240,0:07:46.640

And through this media coverage it raised public awareness about the scale of discrimination that

0:07:46.640,0:07:53.520

our community faced so that began to build public support for change. And of course the protests

0:07:53.520,0:08:00.720

also put people in power under pressure to justify their homophobia. So you know the government,

0:08:00.720,0:08:08.080

the media, the church were put on the back foot by our protests. They were being challenged

0:08:08.080,0:08:16.080

by us and by journalists to justify the homophobia that they were endorsing and eventually over time

0:08:16.880,0:08:22.560

many of them realised that you know this really wasn't a very good PR move that they were losing

0:08:22.560,0:08:29.600

the PR war. The public opinion was turning against them and so it did and that's why eventually

0:08:30.240,0:08:36.400

politicians felt emboldened to legislate reform. You know we would go to politicians and say "Look,

0:08:37.360,0:08:44.240

public opinion polls show that a majority of the public support an equal age consent for

0:08:44.240,0:08:51.120

gay and bisexual men. Public opinion shows that most people now support and enter the

0:08:51.120,0:08:58.480

ban on LGBT+ people in the armed forces". And armed with that information it gave

0:08:59.040,0:09:04.080

politicians the confidence that they could reform the law. (EP): What would you say

0:09:04.080,0:09:08.800

was some of the most an example of one of the most outrageous things that you did

0:09:08.800,0:09:14.480

as part of your campaigning to raise awareness? (PT): Well one of them was going into Canterbury

0:09:14.480,0:09:22.720

Cathedral on Easter Sunday in 1998 to challenge the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey

0:09:23.440,0:09:27.440

over the fact that he wasn't merely saying that gay people were sinful and should repent;

0:09:28.240,0:09:36.240

he was arguing and seeking to persuade Parliament to oppose gay equality to support discrimination

0:09:36.240,0:09:46.720

in law. That to us was so outrageous, particularly because for eight years he refused to meet anyone

0:09:47.360,0:09:53.760

from the LGBT+ community, even members of the lesbian gay Christian movement who were part

0:09:53.760,0:10:01.040

of his own Anglican Church. So when the door was slammed in our face we felt no option but to go

0:10:01.040,0:10:07.440

to Canterbury Cathedral and call him out. Now we didn't interrupt any sacred parts of the service

0:10:07.440,0:10:13.600

but when he began his sermon we did calmly walk into the pulpit,

0:10:14.240,0:10:22.080

hold up placards highlighting different areas

of law that discriminated against us where

0:10:22.080,0:10:27.600

the archbishop supported that law and opposed its repeal, and then I delivered a very short,

0:10:28.800,0:10:35.360

I suppose alternative sermon making the point that discrimination is not a Christian value.

0:10:36.320,0:10:40.640

For our pains we were dragged out of the cathedral by the police.

0:10:41.600,0:10:48.480

I was eventually charged and convicted under the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act

0:10:48.480,0:10:58.400

1860, formerly part of the Brawling Act of 1551

which prohibits any interruption of a minister

0:10:58.400,0:11:05.520

of religion in a place of worship. It's the only instance where there's such a sweeping blanket

0:11:05.520,0:11:12.640

prohibition on protests. However the upshot of the protest was very positive.

0:11:13.360,0:11:20.000

First of all Dr Carey dramatically reduced his advocacy of homophobic discrimination in law,

0:11:21.200,0:11:24.960

secondly he met with the lesbian and gay Christian movement for the very first time,

0:11:25.600,0:11:33.040

and thirdly he appointed a senior bishop to begin

a dialogue with the LGBT+ community. So those

0:11:33.040,0:11:40.080

were three wins out of that one protest. (EP): What is the Church of England's position today

0:11:40.080,0:11:48.240

on LGBT+ people? Has it improved dramatically?

(PT): I would say it's improved but probably not

0:11:48.240,0:11:58.560

dramatically. Certainly the official position of the Church is that homosexuality is inferior

0:11:58.560,0:12:03.280

to heterosexuality although they don't publicly say that much anymore.

0:12:04.960,0:12:12.720

Certainly the Church refuses to accept same-sex marriage. It won't even bless

0:12:13.600,0:12:21.600

same-sex relationships. It will bless dogs and cats, warships and tanks but it won't bless loving

0:12:21.600,0:12:30.880

same-sex couples. Recently the Church has spoken out to its credit against LGBT+ conversion therapy

0:12:31.520,0:12:38.640

so that is a definite movement in the right direction. Globally the worldwide Anglican

0:12:38.640,0:12:47.440

communion, as opposed to the Church of England

itself, is still very very homophobic and is, if

0:12:47.440,0:12:55.920

not dominated, certainly very strongly influenced by a hardline homophobic faction around GAFCON,

0:12:55.920,0:13:02.080
which is an evangelical grouping within the Anglican communion who are very much

0:13:02.080,0:13:11.200
opposed to any progress on LGBT+ rights and any inclusion of LGBT+ people within the Church.

0:13:12.320,0:13:22.240
Moreover, GAFCON actively campaigns to maintain the criminalisation of same-sex relations in

0:13:22.240,0:13:29.040
countries where those laws still exist and to actively attack and undermine those campaigners

0:13:29.040,0:13:36.560
and politicians who seek to strive to end criminalisation and to legislate equality. (EP):

0:13:36.560,0:13:44.480
GAFCON, is that a worldwide organisation? (PT):
GAFCON is a right-wing evangelical faction

0:13:44.480,0:13:50.640
within the worldwide Anglican communion and it's particularly powerful and strong in the global

0:13:50.640,0:13:56.400
south, in countries in Africa and Asia. (EP):
Which are in any event more traditional societies

0:13:56.400,0:14:02.560
where you would expect to find more prejudice against LGBT+ people? (PT): Yes but even in these

0:14:02.560,0:14:13.040
countries there are Christians who support LGBT+ rights like Bishop Christopher Senyonjo in Uganda.

0:14:13.760,0:14:21.760
He was a part of the Church of Uganda, part of the global Anglican communion, and he was effectively

0:14:21.760,0:14:31.520
expelled because he supported LGBT+ rights. But he is still championing the defence of our community

0:14:31.520,0:14:38.240
against discrimination and hate crime at great personal risk to himself in Uganda. (EP):
Within

0:14:38.880,0:14:44.480
the UK we've spoken about the Church of England. What about in terms of other religious groups

0:14:44.480,0:14:50.000
or say factions within different religious groups? To what extent do these continue to

0:14:50.000,0:14:56.880
oppose equality for LGBT+ people? (PT): Well of course the Catholic Church is still very very

0:14:56.880,0:15:04.480
hard line against same-sex rights even though the Pope has tried to project a more liberal image.

0:15:05.600,0:15:12.960
On the ground in reality both he and the wider Catholic communion very much resist

0:15:13.520,0:15:23.600
any advance on LGBT+ equality and indeed some Catholics who have championed LGBT+ rights have

0:15:23.600,0:15:29.600
been forced out of the church. They've in some cases been excommunicated. (EP): And what are

0:15:29.600,0:15:35.920
the religious minorities within the UK? (PT): The Methodist Church in the UK has just voted

0:15:36.560,0:15:41.840
to conduct same-sex marriages. They joined the Scottish Episcopal Church,

0:15:42.720,0:15:50.400
the Unitarians, the Quakers and the United Reformed Church in supporting marriage equality.

0:15:51.360,0:15:56.800
But the Catholic Church, the Presbyterians, the Baptists and many others; they're all

0:15:56.800,0:16:02.800
absolutely still against a same-sex marriage. Which strikes me as rather strange because

0:16:03.840,0:16:09.280
being supporters of marriage and being supporters of love, commitment and fidelity

0:16:09.280,0:16:13.200
you would have thought they would welcome the fact that gay people want to get married.

0:16:13.840,0:16:21.360
But no, their dogma and their prejudice overrides that. (EP): What about in other religions such as

0:16:21.360,0:16:28.000
Muslims and Hindus or Jewish community? To what extent are these different religious groups either

0:16:28.000,0:16:34.640
for or against or different factions within them supportive or not of increasing gay rights? (PT):

0:16:34.640,0:16:42.400
Support for LGBT+ rights in the Jewish community was pioneered by Liberal and Reformed synagogues

0:16:42.960,0:16:51.360
and even now embraced by some Orthodox synagogues as well, but there is a hard line ultra-Orthodox

0:16:52.400,0:17:00.160
Jewish faction which still is very very hostile to LGBT+ rights and in their schools

0:17:00.160,0:17:08.800
and places of worship they very strongly oppose any recognition or support for LGBT+ individuals

0:17:09.600,0:17:16.320
or indeed for LGBT+ human rights in law. When it comes to Islam

0:17:18.000,0:17:25.360
there is basically no support of any faction in Islam for LGBT+ rights.

0:17:26.480,0:17:36.080
There are a handful of individual imams who do give comfort and support to LGBT+ Muslims and

0:17:36.080,0:17:42.240
one or two have spoken out publicly for
LGBT+
rights but they are very much the exception.

0:17:43.280,0:17:51.440
Nevertheless on the ground among ordinary
Muslims
there has been quite a change in attitudes.

0:17:52.160,0:18:00.240
So even though mosques and imams have not
changed, a lot of ordinary Muslims now
would

0:18:01.120,0:18:10.720
tacitly or by default support the non-
persecution
and non-discrimination of LGBT+ people. So
it's

0:18:10.720,0:18:18.640
progress there but very slow and it's not
coming
from the top. The hierarchy in Islam is still
very

0:18:18.640,0:18:25.840
adamantly against LGBT+ rights. (EP): What do
you
think has brought about the change among
normal

0:18:25.840,0:18:31.200
Muslims and how long a time period are we
talking
about for these changes to have happened?
Have

0:18:31.200,0:18:37.760
they happened in recent years? (PT): The
changes
within Islam have only really happened in the
last

0:18:38.400,0:18:46.640
10 years or so and I think it's partly and

largely due to young Muslims who are
growing up

0:18:46.640,0:18:55.840
in the British education system with a public
media that features LGBT+ people and story
lines.

0:18:57.840,0:19:05.600
Their first hand experience is something
quite different. They don't see LGBT+ people

0:19:05.600,0:19:10.960
as the demons that are portrayed
by imams and orthodox Islam.

0:19:12.400,0:19:19.840
I think change has also happened because
more
and more LGBT+ Muslims have come out to
their

0:19:19.840,0:19:27.680
families, their neighbours, their work
colleagues
and in some cases even to their imams and

0:19:28.240,0:19:35.600
fellow congregants at mosques. That's had a
very
powerful impact. It's forced a lot of Muslims
to

0:19:35.600,0:19:43.280
take cognisance of the fact that LGBT+ people
are within their families, their communities

0:19:43.280,0:19:51.520
and their mosques. So the old hardline
approach
is very hard to sustain. Of course there are

0:19:51.520,0:20:00.560
some who will sustain it particularly at the
top.
(EP): So I mean in general would you say that
the

0:20:00.560,0:20:05.840

way forward for just ensuring that not only as a matter of law but also in terms of public attitude

0:20:06.480,0:20:12.720

in Britain being the diverse society that it is..in general would you say that education,

0:20:12.720,0:20:18.800

having a shared education is really important for future generations and changing or sort of

0:20:18.800,0:20:25.520

keeping progressive attitudes in the long term?

)PT): There's no doubt in my mind that having

0:20:25.520,0:20:33.120

a secular education is the key to a more harmonious society, to breaking down barriers,

0:20:33.120,0:20:40.000

divisions and prejudice. And the fact that a third of all schools are faith schools and

0:20:40.000,0:20:47.840

that they are able to teach their own religious ethos around homosexuality and transgenderism

0:20:48.560,0:20:57.760

that is not conducive to an inclusive society. It actually fuels prejudice, discrimination

0:20:58.480,0:21:05.440

and the injustice that our community faces. So for me battling against faith schools

0:21:06.000,0:21:15.840

is part and parcel of the battle for LGBT+ rights.

We know that the government is now bringing in

0:21:16.480,0:21:22.880

mandatory relationship and sex education in every school that's going to be compulsory

0:21:23.760,0:21:30.640

but yet again faith schools are being given an opt-out where they will be allowed to

0:21:30.640,0:21:38.800

teach relationship and sex education while also citing their own religious teachings on the issue

0:21:39.680,0:21:47.440

and so many of these faith schools are from faiths that still regard homosexuality as sinful,

0:21:48.000,0:21:55.440

immoral, abnormal and unnatural. So it means that young LGBT+ kids

0:21:56.160,0:22:03.360

will not get the affirmation and support they need. It means that homophobia, biphobia and

0:22:03.360,0:22:10.080

transphobia will not be fully challenged in those schools and that will make it possible for

0:22:11.200,0:22:16.320

bullying and teasing and name calling and even sometimes actual physical assaults

0:22:16.320,0:22:23.280

to happen in the school playground. But we know that nearly half of all young LGBT kids

0:22:24.320,0:22:30.560

have been victims of bullying on account of their sexuality or their gender identity in

0:22:30.560,0:22:37.760

the classroom or the playground. Nearly half.

And of course in religious schools it is worse

0:22:38.480,0:22:45.280

and in religious schools there is less action taken to prevent it. (EP): Do you think that

0:22:45.280,0:22:52.080

the direction that Britain is going today where

increasing restraints seem to be placed on free

0:22:52.080,0:23:00.320

speech in a number of different areas is likely to make it harder for the LGBT+ community to

0:23:00.320,0:23:07.200

achieve full equality in the medium-term future?

Do you think it's more important to have the right

0:23:07.200,0:23:13.680

to protest freely about these issues or do you think it's more important to keep everyone safe

0:23:13.680,0:23:20.000

by inhibiting the right to say things which some

people might find offensive? (PT): I think there

0:23:20.000,0:23:29.920

is a danger when attempting to protect vulnerable

marginalised communities that in the process we

0:23:29.920,0:23:38.160

end up with laws that actually inhibit free speech

and the right to protest. So we can see in the

0:23:38.160,0:23:44.960

Scottish Hate Crimes Bill the way in which it was

very very broadly drawn. And you know even under

0:23:45.600,0:23:51.760

laws in England and Wales you know there have been

very wide interpretations of the Public Order Act

0:23:52.480,0:24:00.720

of the section which prohibits harassment, alarm

or distress to clamp down on perfectly peaceful

0:24:00.720,0:24:07.840

legitimate protests. You think of the example of the young guy who was arrested for holding up

0:24:07.840,0:24:16.400

placard outside the Scientology headquarters with

the words "Scientology is a dangerous cult". He

0:24:16.400,0:24:23.920

got arrested. So did a student in Oxford who joked

that a policeman's horse was gay. An elderly man

0:24:24.480,0:24:31.840

who put up a poster saying "Religions are fairy

tales" got a knock on his door by the police.

0:24:32.480,0:24:39.280

Now I think that people should have a right to express their point of view and if they are saying

0:24:39.280,0:24:45.840

bigoted, offensive things the most effective way to deal with that is by challenging them,

0:24:46.400,0:24:50.960

by showing why they're wrong, by

producing counter evidence and arguments.

0:24:51.520,0:24:57.200

You know the whole history of the evolution of ideas in our society is about

0:24:58.320,0:25:07.120

questioning skepticism, challenges, debates. You think of some of the greatest minds in history

0:25:07.680,0:25:16.720

caused great offence in their time Galileo Galilei, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx.

0:25:16.720,0:25:23.520

The list is endless. Free speech is one of the most important and precious of all human rights.

0:25:24.640,0:25:31.360

There have to be really strong compelling reasons before we restrict it. Like for example

0:25:31.360,0:25:39.440

if someone makes a false, damaging allegation saying that someone is a paedophile or a rapist.

0:25:40.320,0:25:47.280

That can put their physical safety and danger from mob violence. Another example is if someone

0:25:47.280,0:25:56.240

engages in persistent harassment, threats or menaces so that someone is fearful and unable to

0:25:56.240,0:26:03.040

participate in a public debate because they feel the consequences. And finally and likewise

0:26:04.640,0:26:11.040

if a person incites violence. That is not free speech. It inhibits free speech,

0:26:11.920,0:26:20.320

because the person against whom violence is being incited will be afraid and fearful. They will not

0:26:20.320,0:26:26.560

feel able to engage in debate because they fear potential violent retribution.

0:26:27.760,0:26:36.960

So those three examples I think are legitimate grounds for restricting free speech but otherwise

0:26:37.680,0:26:45.440

the best way to overcome bad ideas is with better ideas. (TS): Yep. (PT): The battle for

0:26:45.440,0:26:52.640

LGBT+ rights was won not by banning people or no platforming them it was one by us engaging

0:26:52.640,0:27:00.480

the bigots to show why they were wrong. To go on TV and radio to speak out against their prejudice,

0:27:01.120,0:27:07.600

to reach an audience of millions to persuade them that the bigots were wrong. And if

0:27:07.600,0:27:14.000

we don't have the confidence to challenge bigotry, to make the counter arguments then

0:27:14.800,0:27:20.640

I frankly despair. We don't deserve to win if we haven't got the confidence to stand our

0:27:20.640,0:27:30.240

ground. Because the arguments we are making are strong, positive and right arguments.

0:27:30.240,0:27:37.360

You know we have the arguments on our side. We can win. We just have to make those arguments

0:27:37.360,0:27:42.960

and that's how you change hearts and minds and by changing hearts and minds how you

0:27:42.960,0:27:50.320

change politicians and persuade them to vote for equality. (EP): So in conclusion the cause of

0:27:50.320,0:27:58.560

greater equality, greater rights for LGBT+ people like many others is served by having a wide wide

0:27:58.560,0:28:06.000

area of free speech and only limits on it in quite extreme cases. (PT): Free speech means nothing

0:28:06.880,0:28:10.560

if it doesn't include the right of people with whom I disagree

0:28:11.600,0:28:18.800

so I'm open to people criticising me. That's their right. They can even do so in quite strong

0:28:18.800,0:28:23.920

robust language, providing they don't incite violence or make false damaging allegations.

0:28:24.960,0:28:29.840

That's why on a number of occasions I have defended Christian street preachers

0:28:30.400,0:28:37.440

who have spoken out against homosexuality. But they haven't been threatening or abusive. They've

0:28:37.440,0:28:43.600

just expressed a point of view and I don't believe they're right but equally I don't believe they

0:28:43.600,0:28:50.320

should be prosecuted as criminals. You know, we have to challenge them, protest against them, show

0:28:50.320,0:28:56.800

why they're wrong but criminalisation is a step too far. (EP): Which side of the line would you

0:28:56.800,0:29:05.360

put insulting on? (PT): There is no right in human rights law to not be insulted or not be offended.

0:29:06.080,0:29:14.640

You know, the right to make strong robust criticisms to ridicule and satire other

0:29:14.640,0:29:22.880

points of view - that is perfectly legitimate in a free society. I was involved with the National

0:29:22.880,0:29:31.520

Secular Society in a campaign to remove the insult clause from the Public Order Act 1986.

0:29:32.480,0:29:43.360

We argued that insult was too low a threshold to justify a criminal offence. We got together with a

0:29:43.360,0:29:51.280
very broad coalition including Conservative
MPs
like Edward Lee and David Davis with whom I
do

0:29:51.280,0:29:59.760
not normally agree and successfully
persuaded
the Government to repeal the insult clause

0:29:59.760,0:30:06.400
from the Public Order Act. Now that was a
very significant victory for free speech.

0:30:07.120,0:30:16.000
We followed up that success with a further
success
a short time afterwards against a Government
bill

0:30:16.000,0:30:25.680
that sought to penalise causing nuisance or
annoyance. We said these were vague
subjective

0:30:25.680,0:30:33.920
terms that could be open to very wide abuse
and
again we persuaded the Government to drop
those

0:30:33.920,0:30:42.720
clauses. (EP): And just finally Peter: what
would
you say are the main obstacles that remain
to

0:30:42.720,0:30:50.160
achieving full LGBT+ equality in Britain today?
(PT): We have made great progress here in
Britain

0:30:50.160,0:30:59.040
but we should never forget that right up until
1999 Britain had by volume the largest
number of

0:30:59.040,0:31:10.000
anti-LGBT+ laws of any country in the world,
some
of them dating back centuries. Yet 14 years
later

0:31:11.280,0:31:17.840
with the legalisation of same-sex marriage
in 2013 Britain had some of the best laws

0:31:18.800,0:31:24.560
that is a phenomenally successful law
reform campaign. But there are still

0:31:24.560,0:31:31.840
issues to fight and win. We are still battling
to secure a ban on LGBT+ conversion
therapy,

0:31:33.200,0:31:39.040
to reform the Gender Recognition Act, to
give trans people the right to self-ID

0:31:39.680,0:31:43.040
by statutory declaration, which
exists in many other countries

0:31:44.000,0:31:54.080
and of course to secure LGBT+ inclusive
education
in all our schools with no exemptions or opt-
outs

0:31:54.080,0:32:01.440
for faith organisations. And on all these
three issues it is religious organisations

0:32:01.440,0:32:08.160
that are kicking back, trying to block
progress. You know the number one focus

0:32:08.960,0:32:16.880
of resistance to LGBT+ rights in Britain
and around the world is organised religion.

0:32:18.240,0:32:25.840
The good news is that religion and religious
influence and privilege is in decline here

0:32:25.840,0:32:31.680
in Britain. And although there are some religious revivals in some other countries,

0:32:32.480,0:32:41.360
overall the global trend is towards a non-religious secular society so I have

0:32:41.360,0:32:48.640
great hope for the future. And I'll finish with my motto which is "Don't accept the world as it is,

0:32:50.000,0:32:56.400
dream of what the world could be and then help make it happen". (EP): Peter Tatchell,

0:32:56.400,0:32:59.480
thank you very much. (PT): Thank you. (EP):

0:33:05.920,0:33:10.800
Terru Sanderson, welcome to the podcast. (TS): Thanks for having me here. (EP): You've been

0:33:10.800,0:33:18.720
campaigning in support of LGBT rights since 1969. What was the situation like when you were first

0:33:18.720,0:33:23.200
campaigning? How were gay people perceived in terms of the sort of general social

0:33:23.200,0:33:30.720
attitudes? (TS): Well of course in 1969 it was only two years after the law had been passed that

0:33:30.720,0:33:37.840
decriminalised homosexuality to an extent. Not

completely but to some degree which gave a little

0:33:37.840,0:33:46.640
bit of freedom to gay people. The hangover from the pre-1967 days when gay people were regarded

0:33:46.640,0:33:54.880
quite widely as being undesirable and criminal and corrupt and all the other things that were

0:33:54.880,0:34:02.960
said about us. Those attitudes were a long time changing since then of course. We've made a lot of

0:34:02.960,0:34:08.400
progress but it was slow and often it felt like, you know, one step forward and two steps back.

0:34:09.280,0:34:16.800
But here we are; we've made a lot of progress. We're almost legal completely nowadays. (EP): Yeah

0:34:16.800,0:34:24.320
you mentioned that the 1967 law decriminalised homosexuality to an extent. When did that

0:34:24.320,0:34:30.640
decriminalisation, apart from the adultery issue, finally disappear in English law? (TS): It took

0:34:30.640,0:34:40.320
a long, I mean in 1967 the law decriminalised homosexuality for people over 21 "in private" and

0:34:40.320,0:34:49.200

what "in private" meant wasn't really defined.
And so there was a lot of misunderstanding,

0:34:49.200,0:34:55.760
a lot of persecution by the police who wanted to continue arresting gay people like, you know, if

0:34:56.480,0:35:02.880
they were having sex outside somewhere that then that was still illegal. If there were more than

0:35:02.880,0:35:10.080
two people present they then, they could be arrested for that. So the persecution went on

0:35:11.200,0:35:17.840
and it took a long time and a lot of parliamentary effort to bring the age of consent

0:35:18.480,0:35:26.320
into equality. So you know for straight people the age of consent was 16, for gay people it

0:35:26.320,0:35:32.800
was 21. Eventually, after a lot of campaigning, a lot of agitation, it was brought down to 18

0:35:34.160,0:35:40.320
and still it wasn't equality. So we were reluctant to accept that because you know we were

0:35:40.320,0:35:47.440
second-class citizens again. We were different.
And so the campaign continued until eventually

0:35:47.440,0:35:55.440
the age of consent was equalised and we were all
16. (EP): Now talking of your long history of

0:35:55.440,0:36:01.600
campaigning when did you start campaigning with the National Secular Society and what motivated

0:36:01.600,0:36:09.760
you to join the NSS? (TS) Well I'd noticed over a long period that religion was almost entirely

0:36:09.760,0:36:16.720
responsible for the opposition to gay rights. All the agitation was either done by religious groups

0:36:16.720,0:36:24.400
or people purporting to come from a religious perspective. The religious MPs in Parliament were,

0:36:24.400,0:36:32.880
you know, very aggressive and I thought well why would I tolerate that? Why would I want

0:36:32.880,0:36:40.160
to be part of an organisation that wanted to deprive me of my human rights? But beyond that

0:36:40.160,0:36:48.880
I also had become sort of disillusioned if you like with religion and it's ridiculous claims.

0:36:50.800,0:36:57.840
So I was an atheist to start with. Then when I saw the way that religion was trying very hard at

0:36:57.840,0:37:06.080
every opportunity to retard gay rights I thought the time had come to stand in opposition to

0:37:06.080,0:37:10.720
that. (EP): Are we talking specifically the

Church of England or Catholicism as well or

0:37:10.720,0:37:16.480

other religions? (TS): Every religion. There wasn't a single religion that I heard of that

0:37:16.480,0:37:21.920

wasn't opposed to gay rights to some extent.

And

yes there were people who were on the liberal end

0:37:21.920,0:37:27.600

of all of these things that would say "yes that's

okay, we're not opposed to you", but, you know, in

0:37:27.600,0:37:37.760

the central doctrines and you know the hierarchy

of all these religions there was a hostility to

0:37:37.760,0:37:45.360

gay rights. And I felt that I had to oppose that in some way and when I joined the NSS it was very

0:37:45.360,0:37:53.200

much an atheistic organisation. It was still in the Charles Bradlaugh arena of, you know, being

0:37:53.200,0:38:01.600

anti-religion and that suited me fine because it

was up from that platform that I could respond

0:38:01.600,0:38:10.960

to some of these initiatives by religion to put gay rights back in the closet. (EP): Do you have

0:38:10.960,0:38:16.880

any examples of specific religious opponents or

specific moves that any of these religious groups

0:38:16.880,0:38:24.640

made that were particularly outrageous? (TS):

Yes, I mean during the parliamentary debates on

0:38:25.920,0:38:32.160

gay marriage and the thing that that preceded it, the civil partnerships,

0:38:33.280,0:38:40.080

in Parliament the Church of England and the Bench

of Bishops tried desperately to stop that getting

0:38:40.080,0:38:47.680

through, to stop Parliament giving gay people even an inferior version of recognition of their

0:38:48.640,0:38:54.640

relationships. Later on they tried to claim that "oh no" we thought when the gay marriage

0:38:54.640,0:39:00.400

debate came up they thought, they claimed that:

"oh we'd never opposed civil partnerships but

0:39:02.160,0:39:06.720

we do oppose gay marriage. We thought civil partnerships are okay". But that's rewriting

0:39:06.720,0:39:11.600

history. If you go back and look at the debates that the Bench of Bishops were

0:39:11.600,0:39:16.720

dreadfully opposed to civil partnerships when they were being brought forward. (P): What were

0:39:16.720,0:39:20.560
their reasons for opposing civil partnerships?
(TS): Well of course they thought it undermined

0:39:20.560,0:39:25.600
the concept of marriage. They thought that marriage was for heterosexuals, for men and women

0:39:25.600,0:39:32.480
for the purposes of procreation. And they didn't think that gay people were entitled to that. And

0:39:32.480,0:39:38.000
by giving gay people any form of recognition in their relationships, any legal recognition,

0:39:38.560,0:39:45.760
it, in their eyes, undermined the whole concept of marriage. (EP): As far as LGBT equality in the UK

0:39:45.760,0:39:50.240
specifically today is concerned. and we've got two different things. On the one hand we've got legal

0:39:50.240,0:39:55.840
equality and on the other hand we've got social attitudes and the attitudes of religious groups.

0:39:55.840,0:40:02.880
In terms of legal equality are LGBT rights there? Have they achieved equality under UK law? (TS):

0:40:02.880,0:40:08.960
When I look back to when i started and where we are now, I would say that

0:40:09.520,0:40:15.840
we are more or less there. There are you know tiny tiny little loopholes that need to be closed but

0:40:15.840,0:40:24.160
they don't amount to a great deal and I think we more or less have equality now. And I don't

0:40:24.160,0:40:28.960
think there's a great deal more to do. I'm sure that Peter Tatchell will tell you differently,

0:40:29.920,0:40:36.080
but I think that you know from my perspective we have achieved legal equality. What we've got to do

0:40:36.080,0:40:42.640
now is stop it being pushed back by the attempts of organisations like the Vatican and the Church

0:40:42.640,0:40:47.200
of England. (EP): Just on the subject of Peter Tatchell, I because you've occasionally crossed

0:40:47.200,0:40:52.960
paths during your long years of campaigning, do you have any specific memories of campaigning

0:40:52.960,0:41:01.760
with him? (TS): Oh yeah, yeah we he once organised the protest in Westminster. There was a rule that

0:41:02.400,0:41:06.240
you could not have a demonstration within (I don't know it was maybe a mile or something) of

0:41:06.240,0:41:15.360

Parliament while it was sitting . So Peter decided that he would have a a demonstration within that

0:41:15.360,0:41:22.800

mile so that he was protesting about the right to demonstrate and to tell Parliament

0:41:22.800,0:41:31.600

what he thought about things. So we all turned up and lay down within the the one mile radius

0:41:32.160,0:41:36.000

of Parliament and the police had been warned about this and they were there with all

0:41:37.520,0:41:44.320

their Black Mariahs and we were all arrested and and loaded into these Black Mariahs

0:41:44.320,0:41:49.360

and carted off to the police station and put in cells. And this was the very first time

0:41:49.360,0:41:54.480

I'd ever ever been arrested or had dealings with the police and I'd certainly never seen

0:41:54.480,0:42:00.320

the inside of a police cell before. And I was banged up with Derek Jarman, the famous film

0:42:00.320,0:42:05.840

director, and he was very reassuring because I was actually quite scared and he said "oh don't worry

0:42:05.840,0:42:11.200

they'll just give you a caution. You'll be home

before the day's out". And he was right of course.

0:42:11.200,0:42:17.680

It was just you know the police had to go through the motions and we had to go through the motions

0:42:18.960,0:42:24.720

and that's one of the memories I have of campaigning with Peter. (EP):Just a couple more

0:42:24.720,0:42:31.360

questions. I mean so as far as you're concerned is religion or our religions still the biggest

0:42:31.360,0:42:38.880

ideological opponents in the world to LGBT equality? (TS): Yes if not directly

0:42:39.520,0:42:47.920

then through religious influence in politics. You see the Vatican pushing constantly. They

0:42:47.920,0:42:53.200

will tell you that "no we don't, we don't try, we don't interfere in politics at all",

0:42:53.200,0:42:57.680

but of course they do all the time. And they and their representatives in

0:42:57.680,0:43:06.400

parliaments all around the world are trying to carry out the Vatican's agenda. So yes

0:43:08.640,0:43:14.560

politics and religion are, when they combine, are absolutely lethal for gay rights.

0:43:15.200,0:43:23.920

And if you look at the politics of Hungary and Poland at the moment, you see that.

Although

0:43:23.920,0:43:29.200
they're populist in the sense that you know they will say and do anything that will get them votes,

0:43:29.200,0:43:36.640
they've identified gay people and gay rights as an unpopular minority which can be exploited

0:43:36.640,0:43:42.880
for electoral gain. And of course they can use the Catholic Church as justification for that

0:43:42.880,0:43:49.600
saying "oh this is a Christian nation and you know the Church tells us that homosexuality is

0:43:49.600,0:43:57.040
unacceptable" and so you know that gives them the right and the opportunity to persecute gay people

0:43:57.040,0:44:05.840
for electoral advantage. So I think that religion really is still a very very strong opponent of gay

0:44:05.840,0:44:12.480
rights and in some places it's becoming more so. It's becoming much more aggressive. So I think we

0:44:12.480,0:44:17.120
have to be careful about becoming complacent and imagining that it couldn't happen here

0:44:18.080,0:44:24.160
because I think it probably could. (EP): A final question. Is it possible to be religious

0:44:24.160,0:44:31.840

and gay in your view? (TS) Well you can and a lot of people are. I think that you know

0:44:31.840,0:44:39.760
being religious or having a faith is a little bit different to being part of an organised religion

0:44:39.760,0:44:46.560
because I think that gay people who are attached to organised religion like Catholicism

0:44:47.920,0:44:55.280
are mad basically because why would you want to support an organisation that hates you? I never

0:44:55.280,0:45:03.040
ever understood that. And yet as we know from long experience the Catholic Church is packed

0:45:03.040,0:45:09.760
with gay people in the hierarchy and some of the worst homophobes turn out in the end to

0:45:09.760,0:45:18.320
be gay themselves. And that's also very apparent amongst the Evangelical nations in America where,

0:45:18.320,0:45:23.680
in the Evangelical states I should say, where some of the highest profile televangelists have all

0:45:23.680,0:45:28.560
been caught out in gay situations that they would prefer not to have been. (EP): So there's a sort

0:45:28.560,0:45:34.800

of contradiction there, ideological contradiction.
(TS): There is a contradiction. I think that

a positive review wherever you can. Thanks for listening and I hope you can join us next time.

0:45:36.000,0:45:43.840
religion can pervert people's minds. It can drive them to such a degree of self-hatred that they

0:45:43.840,0:45:53.200
actually want to damage other gay people. So you know it's a very difficult relationship between

0:45:53.200,0:46:00.560
homosexuality and religion for some people. I feel very sorry when people are driven to

0:46:00.560,0:46:07.760
self-hatred by a conflict with that and religious faith. (EP): Terry Sanderson thank you very much.

0:46:13.520,0:46:18.000
This episode was produced by the National Secular Society, all rights reserved. The

0:46:18.000,0:46:21.760
views expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of the NSS.

0:46:22.560,0:46:27.360
You can access the show notes and subscriber information for this and all our episodes at

0:46:27.360,0:46:33.680
secularism.org.uk/podcast. For feedback, comments and suggestions please email

0:46:33.680,0:46:39.760
podcast@secularism.org.uk. If you enjoyed this episode please subscribe and leave us

0:46:39.760,0:46:52.800