

Geoffrey Robertson QC: Exploring religious freedom episode 07

Video available at: <https://youtu.be/uOuTCTdEP3k>

0:00:02.110,0:00:06.830

[Alastair Lichten] Hello and welcome to the latest episode of the National Secular society podcast

0:00:06.830,0:00:12.350

I'm Alastair Lichten, Head of Education at the NSS, and this is part 7 in our series

0:00:12.350,0:00:17.270

of interviews Exploring Religious Freedom. A few weeks ago I spoke with

0:00:17.270,0:00:21.500

Geoffrey Robertson QC. Jeffrey will tell you about his work so I won't do too

0:00:21.500,0:00:25.460

much of an introduction. I am however excited to announce that he will be

0:00:25.460,0:00:29.300

presenting the Secularist of the Year award at our upcoming conference

0:00:29.300,0:00:34.069

Secularism 2019. There will be links in the show notes and I'll be back at the

0:00:34.069,0:00:42.440

end of the episode with more details. Enjoy. Geoffrey Robertson welcome to the NSS podcast.

0:00:42.440,0:00:46.300

[GR] Thank you.

[AL] Would you like to start by introducing yourself to the audience?

0:00:46.309,0:00:55.190

[GR] Well I'm Geoffrey Robertson QC. My life

is an open book. It's called Rather His Own Man,

0:00:55.190,0:01:02.959

it's just been published, In Court with Tyrants, Tarts and Troublemakers. So

0:01:02.959,0:01:08.780

if you want to know about me, read my autobiography.

[AL] I'll have a link to that

0:01:08.780,0:01:13.270

in the show notes.

What does religious freedom mean to you?

0:01:13.270,0:01:23.230

[GR] It means the right of every person to, if they're so minded, if they want

0:01:23.230,0:01:32.260

consolation from some superstition or other, to embrace that. There are some

0:01:32.260,0:01:38.960

confusions because human rights treaties sometimes talk about not only holding

0:01:38.960,0:01:47.360

beliefs, but also practicing them and some practices are simply not on, in

0:01:47.360,0:01:54.880

human rights terms, because they have to be balanced against the rights of others.

0:01:54.880,0:02:02.229

You can believe what you like.

You can believe in Rastafarianism or

0:02:02.229,0:02:09.170

Scientology or Methodism or whatever, but if the practices of that religion

0:02:09.170,0:02:15.970
impinge on the right of others then, there are lines to be drawn.

0:02:15.970,0:02:21.150
Religious freedom doesn't mean all those

0:02:21.330,0:02:29.049
fanatical Pakistani Muslims chanting for the death of a poor Christian woman. We

0:02:29.049,0:02:39.390
saw that obscene spectacle last year. That's not what religious freedom means.

0:02:39.390,0:02:47.110
[AL] What first drew you to human rights advocacy?
[GR] I grew up in Australia where, in the 50s and 60s,

0:02:47.110,0:02:53.140
the churches were very strong and very repressive. It was a very repressive

0:02:53.140,0:02:58.299
society, particularly a racist society, they had what they called a White

0:02:58.299,0:03:06.280
Australia Policy. They didn't allow any non-whites into the country. They had a

0:03:06.280,0:03:11.890
system where they didn't include Aboriginal people, the indigenous people,

0:03:11.890,0:03:16.739
as Australians. They couldn't vote and they couldn't be counted in the census.

0:03:16.740,0:03:22.720
It was a stupid and brutal country, particularly because of the policies of

0:03:22.720,0:03:28.540
the churches. When I started to practice law, I started to become

0:03:28.540,0:03:34.419
interested in the way the court system was discriminating against Aborigines.

0:03:34.419,0:03:39.549
Some of them were being prosecuted and convicted of crimes they

0:03:39.549,0:03:45.849
didn't commit. And so that was, I guess, the first thing. Australia was

0:03:45.849,0:03:52.299
always very close to South Africa it was playing tests, cricket and football tests

0:03:52.299,0:03:57.220
with South Africa, and Peter Haine came out and I became friendly with him. And

0:03:57.220,0:04:04.690
so I was involved in the anti-apartheid struggle as well. So they were the kind

0:04:04.690,0:04:15.280
of issues that drew me, as a young lawyer, I guess, into the civil liberties. We

0:04:15.280,0:04:21.780
called Human Rights 'Civil Liberties' in those days. We

0:04:21.780,0:04:27.720
had to fight for them against fairly brutal policemen. And, of course, the other

0:04:27.720,0:04:35.030
thing that, I think, makes Americans and Australians perhaps a little more

0:04:35.030,0:04:42.870
practical than British people, is that we had to fight Vietnam. We had to

0:04:42.870,0:04:49.050
fight conscription. We were being
conscripted to be sent off to kill

0:04:49.050,0:04:59.970
people, civilians and children, who
was simply of a different colour. So

0:04:59.970,0:05:07.350
we were pretty hardened, I think, by that
experience. Britain did not go through

0:05:07.350,0:05:14.640
that. because of the wisdom of the Wilson
government in the 60s. but it's often not

0:05:14.640,0:05:23.250
appreciated how that does, perhaps, make ...
It was interesting how, when I came to

0:05:23.250,0:05:27.960
Britain in the early 70s and got
involved in civil liberties campaigns,

0:05:27.960,0:05:36.650
just how many people had come from
Australia or New Zealand or America,

0:05:36.650,0:05:43.720
hardened by their experience in anti-vietnam
campaigns.

0:05:43.720,0:05:48.560
[AL] I will be speaking to Peter Tatchell in a
podcast.
[GR] Yes, well Peter is a good example. He
grew

0:05:48.560,0:05:55.180
up in Australia at the same time as I did.
He started, I think, with anti-Vietnam

0:05:55.180,0:06:02.400
and then went on, of course, with Gay Rights.
[AL] Perhaps some of the

0:06:02.400,0:06:07.380
cases you're best known for, is defending

Gay News in the Mary Whitehouse blasphemy

0:06:07.380,0:06:11.640
case, and you've also acted for Salman
Rushdie.
[GR] Yes.

0:06:11.640,0:06:18.120
[AL] So both these cases were around 30
years
ago. 30 Years is a lot. But

0:06:18.120,0:06:21.600
what you think is the significance
of those cases today?

0:06:21.600,0:06:27.210
[GR] Well, I think in Mary Whitehouse's case,
she was a very vicious Christian. She was

0:06:27.210,0:06:35.570
backed by the moral rearmament movement,
and her very right-wing view, she was

0:06:35.570,0:06:43.000
totally opposed to gays, she tried to
attack the churches whenever they

0:06:43.000,0:06:51.320
suggested that was any hope of salvation
for them, and her agenda was to harness

0:06:51.320,0:07:00.740
the courts, the law, to condemn secularism
in various forms. So she was rather liked

0:07:00.740,0:07:09.260
by the conservative judges who were
happy to say with her that Christianity

0:07:09.260,0:07:16.160
is part of the law of England, and this
was something that had to be removed. She

0:07:16.160,0:07:23.510
had a very belligerent, red-faced,
tub-thumping, bible-bashing. QC called

0:07:23.510,0:07:34.000
John Smythe, who was always thinking of ways to attack either gays or

0:07:34.000,0:07:42.260
secularists. He was behind the Romans in May, the prosecution of Gay News for a

0:07:42.260,0:07:49.130
poem that suggested that homosexuals might get to heaven, and he was the

0:07:49.130,0:07:54.710
architect of the attack on the National Theatre over showing a play called the

0:07:54.710,0:08:05.870
Romans in Britain, which, yes, it showed Romans raping druid priests when

0:08:05.870,0:08:10.910
they conquered Britain, but the real objection was that it showed, in the

0:08:10.910,0:08:15.680
second act, the brutal Romans as the SAS, the

0:08:15.680,0:08:22.120
paratroopers and the British Army in Ireland. So it was a political

0:08:22.120,0:08:29.150
objection. She was very right-wing as well as being overly Christian, and

0:08:29.150,0:08:37.339
fanatically Christian, and trying to use the law, in a courtroom crusade, against

0:08:37.339,0:08:42.870
the permissive society which was led by John Smythe,

0:08:42.870,0:08:51.570
who, as we now know, was himself a brutal sadist - who was allowed to pick

0:08:51.570,0:08:58.770
up kids from a nearby public school and take them to his shed, his potting

0:08:58.770,0:09:05.990
shed, and then cane them for masturbating. This was the sort of secret

0:09:05.990,0:09:13.830
mentality. And he was called in by a very stupid headmaster and told that he

0:09:13.830,0:09:19.740
wouldn't be reported to police if he left the country. And he left for South

0:09:19.740,0:09:27.210
Africa where he continued his extremely sadistic bent. The

0:09:27.210,0:09:33.350
police investigation only came out when a couple of his victims, years later,

0:09:33.350,0:09:39.960
revealed it. Of course they recommended his prosecution but he died

0:09:39.960,0:09:49.920
before the retribution in the courts could be achieved. That is, I suppose,

0:09:49.920,0:09:57.450
an example of extreme hypocrisy. He was the persecutor of gays and

0:09:57.450,0:10:04.440
secularists in the late seventies. And the importance of stopping them, and they

0:10:04.440,0:10:11.550
were stopped - at the Romans in Britain we managed to destroy Mrs. Whitehouse and

0:10:11.550,0:10:19.350
her private prosecution. I remember her, when the case fell apart, was thrown

0:10:19.350,0:10:23.490
out, she sat huddled in the back of the court,

0:10:23.490,0:10:32.720
with having financed this expensive
prosecution, and near to tears, she was

0:10:32.720,0:10:38.160
enraged.
She was fundamentally wrong in thinking

0:10:38.160,0:10:44.730
that her particular religion
could be enforced through the

0:10:44.730,0:10:48.450
law, through, in that case, the common law.
So it was

0:10:48.450,0:10:55.500
very important to stop her in her
tracks, which we finally did. The

0:10:55.500,0:11:03.110
Salman Rushdie case was
quite different. It was a case of

0:11:03.110,0:11:09.980
international religious terrorism. The
Ayatollah Khomeini put £3 million

0:11:09.980,0:11:17.420
down for someone to come and assassinate
Salman.
He went into hiding of course.

0:11:17.460,0:11:22.840
He hid in my attic for a while. He was a friend
[AL] He's not still there is he?

0:11:22.840,0:11:30.000
[GR] Ha ha! No. He's now courageously going
about
town, town usually being New York, quite

0:11:30.000,0:11:38.700
openly, although the bounty is still on his
head. But back on Valentine's Day 1989,

0:11:38.700,0:11:48.050
when the fatwa was issued, he went into
hiding and the Muslim groups who

0:11:48.050,0:11:56.100
protested, burnt the book, behaved absurdly
given its contents, wanted to flush him

0:11:56.100,0:12:04.800
out of hiding, they served a writ.
17 Muslim barristers brought an

0:12:04.800,0:12:13.740
action for sedition and for blasphemy
against him. I acted for him. It was a

0:12:13.740,0:12:21.570
good occasion to set out the evidence.
And, of course when you looked at and

0:12:21.570,0:12:27.930
analyzed the Satanic Verses, it isn't
blasphemous in any conception of

0:12:27.930,0:12:33.839
blasphemy. But these people had been so
keyed up, I don't think any of them had

0:12:33.839,0:12:39.870
actually read the book, any of the
protesters, and there they were burning

0:12:39.870,0:12:46.920
it, and in some protests a number of
people were killed because they were so
hyped up.

0:12:46.920,0:12:56.030
So I think the action brought against
him, it was important in ending

0:12:56.030,0:12:59.880
prosecutions for sedition, which was the
stupid old law

0:12:59.880,0:13:05.009
that was still around, and the court ruled

that it couldn't be brought unless there
0:13:05.009,0:13:12.110
was violence. And it was important in
ending blasphemy, because it ruled that
0:13:12.110,0:13:19.410
blasphemy didn't apply to religions
other than Christianity, or in fact to
0:13:19.410,0:13:27.329
attacks on other than the established
Church of England, so it couldn't stay. We
0:13:27.329,0:13:32.180
had to abolish the blasphemy laws
because we couldn't have this
0:13:32.180,0:13:40.740
discriminatory criminal offense. So it
helped in the path, in the progress
0:13:40.740,0:13:49.199
towards a secular society. At the end of
the day Christianity was no longer part
0:13:49.199,0:13:57.990
of the Law of England,
and we didn't have crimes that could be
0:13:57.990,0:14:04.860
used against secularists or gays.
[AL] Would you agree that there's a bit of an
echo
0:14:04.860,0:14:09.180
of that dynamic today, that if we look at
the threats to religious freedom you
0:14:09.180,0:14:15.260
have on the one hand physical violence,
international terrorism, international
0:14:15.260,0:14:20.550
authoritarian regimes, physically
oppressing and then you have people
0:14:20.550,0:14:26.730

pursuing a legal strategy to undermine
rights, or to assert through the legal
0:14:26.730,0:14:30.779
strategy, a right to discriminate?
[GR] Well I think there are still groups of
0:14:30.779,0:14:36.540
Christians, of course, particularly, but
also other religions, the Jewish religion
0:14:36.540,0:14:48.089
has now the churches of Christianity, the
temples, the Muslim groups, look to the
0:14:48.089,0:14:54.000
law, but increasingly, interestingly and
ironically, they're starting to look to
0:14:54.000,0:14:59.810
human rights law, because they do have
rights. And a number of cases are
0:14:59.810,0:15:07.180
exploring just where the line is drawn.
We have,
0:15:07.180,0:15:14.230
for example, the bakers who
refused to ice a cake for gay
0:15:14.230,0:15:22.620
marriage and things like that. These
issues need to be sorted out, and so
0:15:22.620,0:15:29.470
tentatively, case-by-case, we try to
develop it. I mean, in this country
0:15:29.470,0:15:38.790
we seem to be relaxed about women
who wear hijabs, although, that's, for my
money,
0:15:38.790,0:15:46.059
indicative of the extent to which
they're oppressed and is insulting.

0:15:46.059,0:15:52.839

[AL] But any sort of ban on it would not pass the test.

[GR] Well in France they banned it. I would certainly not

0:15:52.839,0:16:00.360

allow a woman wearing a veil to give evidence in court when I was a judge. But

0:16:00.360,0:16:07.449

whether they should be allowed to cover up in public is a matter that needs to

0:16:07.449,0:16:15.730

be considered. There are arguments on both sides, and so we are seeing, in a

0:16:15.730,0:16:26.230

sense, the religious groups coming in to argue their case, but on human rights law

0:16:26.230,0:16:33.449

terms. A lot of the fuss about anti-semitism, you'll notice there's

0:16:33.449,0:16:41.199

distinctions being drawn between criticizing Israel as a government, the

0:16:41.199,0:16:47.819

Netanyahu government, and criticizing Jews generally, which is

0:16:47.819,0:16:55.230

anti-semitic. Whereas criticizing the Netanyahu government isn't. But it is

0:16:55.230,0:17:01.059

making distinctions between those two, and I wouldn't have thought, I don't

0:17:01.059,0:17:10.079

notice much criticism, there should be more, of Orthodox Jewry, Jewish religion.

0:17:10.079,0:17:18.130

Perhaps the fear of anti-semitism is

curbing criticism of the religion itself,

0:17:18.130,0:17:22.620

which, of course, is not anti-semitic. So it's drawing those

0:17:22.620,0:17:29.730

distinctions. But the way we've moved on is that we are drawing them and arguing

0:17:29.730,0:17:37.010

them out on the basis of human rights principles and not on the basis of some

0:17:37.010,0:17:43.000

absolute law that Christianity must be protected or whatever.

0:17:43.000,0:17:49.440

[AL] Is that just maybe human rights has been a victim of its own success? That we framed

0:17:49.440,0:17:55.710

all instances this narrative of human rights, and someone, there's a

0:17:55.710,0:17:59.850

phrase, not sure who it's attributed to, but tells people when you're used to

0:17:59.850,0:18:06.480

privileged equality feels like a fashion. Groups that have

0:18:06.480,0:18:11.669

traditionally been able to be in privileged society, been able to, been happy to

0:18:11.669,0:18:16.020

to impose their values on other people, there's pushback, and that feels to

0:18:16.020,0:18:22.380

them like oppression.

[GR] I think that's an interesting point. But if I were a

0:18:22.380,0:18:34.080

committed Christian, I would feel very lost today if I had experienced the

0:18:34.080,0:18:40.380
law and the establishment in the days when Mary Whitehouse ruled it.

0:18:40.440,0:18:45.060
That was in the late seventies and early eighties

0:18:45.060,0:18:48.980
[AL] There is a lot of case law that's been developed since our adoption of the European

0:18:49.040,0:18:53.580
Convention of Human Rights and Human Rights Act, to deepen our

0:18:53.580,0:18:58.980
understanding of what religious freedom means.
What can be done to make that

0:18:58.980,0:19:03.960
record of developing understanding more accessible to people?

0:19:03.960,0:19:10.180
Because, I mean, I think it's fair to say, that human rights are very poorly understood.

0:19:10.180,0:19:16.200
[GR] Yes, I would agree with you and it's not easy because at this stage

0:19:16.200,0:19:21.690
we're getting terribly complicated. I mean, I welcome the Human Rights Act,

0:19:21.690,0:19:27.169
because I thought it would make the law less complex, we wouldn't

0:19:27.169,0:19:33.710
have the old common law going from case to case. We would have a set of

0:19:33.710,0:19:40.070
principles on which you could construct logical arguments. But, because it's got

0:19:40.070,0:19:45.409
caught up in discrimination law and it's complicated to decide

0:19:45.409,0:19:50.840
between direct and indirect discrimination, and so on and so forth, it

0:19:50.840,0:19:57.769
has got a bit too technical. And while we're going through this process the

0:19:57.769,0:20:03.730
Human Rights Act has only been operating for less than 20 years, and

0:20:03.730,0:20:09.490
we're going through this process of getting precedents, of sorting out what

0:20:09.490,0:20:19.610
the law requires in particular cases, and so that takes some time. And I could go

0:20:19.610,0:20:25.999
on about the need for better law reporting, the need for actually teaching

0:20:25.999,0:20:32.029
kids at school Human Rights starting from there, telling them what this basis

0:20:32.029,0:20:37.490
of our law is all about, and inviting them to develop or refine it themselves.

0:20:37.490,0:20:43.519
So, you know, it is a problem with all law, and it's a pity that it's

0:20:43.519,0:20:49.249
still a problem with human rights because that depends on everyone knowing

0:20:49.249,0:20:55.120
their rights and being able to understand it.
[AL] I'll give you an example that comes up
quite a lot.

0:20:55.120,0:20:59.480
We tend to see cases in the office. We rather
derisively refer to them as

0:20:59.480,0:21:09.360
'fired for praying at work' cases.
Someone's in some position of power:

0:21:09.369,0:21:16.399
nurse, teacher, and it comes up. And this
is driven by these conservative,

0:21:16.399,0:21:21.710
strongly conservative Christian religious
groups, and you see a lot the story

0:21:21.710,0:21:25.460
that this person that's been fired
for praying at one, and obviously, if

0:21:25.460,0:21:28.549
someone was fired just for being a
Christian that would be a terrible form

0:21:28.549,0:21:32.899
of persecution that we would never tolerate,
but it comes out,

0:21:32.899,0:21:36.659
it gets a very sympathetic hearing in
certain areas of the press,

0:21:36.659,0:21:40.889
and then months or years later it actually
comes to an employment tribunal,

0:21:40.889,0:21:47.419
where the case is just thrown out,
[GR] Because, obviously, yes, you can be
whatever

0:21:47.419,0:21:52.979

religion you like, so long as you don't
ram it down other people's throats, and

0:21:52.979,0:21:58.080
so long as your practice of it does not
impinge on the rights of other people,

0:21:58.080,0:22:03.059
whether your employer or your fellow
workers.

[AL] What I'm saying is the coverage

0:22:03.059,0:22:07.679
of the actual employment
tribunal case, this is what actually happened,

0:22:07.679,0:22:13.080
is just not comparable to the coverage
of this person sounding sympathetic.

0:22:13.080,0:22:17.729
I was just fired for saying what my Christian

0:22:17.729,0:22:23.729
views of marriage were...
[GR] You're infuriating everyone else,
insulting everyone

0:22:23.729,0:22:30.389
else, and assuming or saying that
being gay was a crime and so on. Yes, of

0:22:30.389,0:22:37.559
course, I suppose they do
get more sympathetic coverage, but

0:22:37.559,0:22:45.210
then again sometimes you've got to admit
the rights of Christians are infringed.

0:22:45.210,0:22:53.099
I mean, I don't mind if a BA
stewardess leans over to serve me my

0:22:53.099,0:23:00.779
drink and her crucifix drops down, as
long as it doesn't drop in my coffee.

0:23:00.779,0:23:09.509

There are cases where overzealous secularism, if you like, has

0:23:09.509,0:23:20.280

infringed the rights of Christians. So I'm not upset that these test cases are being taken.

0:23:20.280,0:23:23.720

[AL] Balancing rights will mean that you have some cases that seem a

0:23:23.729,0:23:28.970

little unfair, but I'm not talking about those particular cases, I'm talking about the

0:23:28.970,0:23:35.009

constant building of this narrative, case-by-case.

[GR] Oh yes. I know. Well,

0:23:35.009,0:23:40.739

Christians love beating themselves up. In a sense it's part of a lot of

0:23:40.739,0:23:48.900

religions actually, it's part of almost the culture of being repressed,

0:23:48.900,0:23:56.760

being oppressed. And really Christians shouldn't feel like that. They

0:23:56.760,0:24:03.510

are perfectly protected in this country. And, indeed, the problems that Christians

0:24:03.510,0:24:12.660

face in Egypt, in Indonesia, I mean Pakistan. It's time that, I think,

0:24:12.660,0:24:17.910

we concentrated on defending the rights of Christians in these other

0:24:17.910,0:24:24.480

benighted countries, where they're

surrounded by haters and people

0:24:24.480,0:24:33.090

whose behavior is obscene.

[AL] And these are typical. Now, in China, we have an

0:24:33.090,0:24:37.580

officially atheist state persecuting Christians. But, predominantly, this is

0:24:37.580,0:24:41.280

where Christians are a religious minority, and you have over there an

0:24:41.280,0:24:45.330

authoritarian religious regime that's persecuting them. It's somewhat

0:24:45.330,0:24:49.799

strange, I would say unseemly, sometimes to be in a country where Christianity is

0:24:49.799,0:24:56.970

so privileged, and certain Christians...

[GR] Well, Christianity is too privileged. We have to

0:24:56.970,0:25:01.290

get rid of the established church. It's crazy. We don't have a written

0:25:01.290,0:25:07.860

constitution but it's crazy that the established church is treated as if it's

0:25:07.860,0:25:13.020

established in a way that other churches are not. That's the Anglican Church, it's

0:25:13.020,0:25:19.970

is ridiculous they should have 26 of the bishops cluttering up the House of Lords,

0:25:19.970,0:25:27.360

adding very little if anything to the deliberations of Parliament. It's

0:25:27.360,0:25:34.799
ridiculous that we should have prayers. I shall never forget the gay news case.

0:25:34.799,0:25:40.380
We were waiting to come on, in the those days the House of Lords Judicial

0:25:40.380,0:25:47.580
Committee was the Supreme Court, and 10:25 we had to sit there listening

0:25:47.580,0:25:53.669
to the prayers with which the House of Lords opened every day. It's

0:25:53.669,0:25:56.690
ridiculous. They're always Anglican prayers

0:25:56.690,0:26:02.559
and we should get rid of them entirely. Parliament should not be, it's perhaps

0:26:02.559,0:26:12.320
not the most urgent matter, but it is symbolic, important in law, and, of course,

0:26:12.320,0:26:19.779
all the tax breaks that the churches are given are outrageous.

0:26:19.779,0:26:26.779
Churches are charities. Even the bloody Scientologists can claim to be a

0:26:26.779,0:26:31.399
church, to get charitable to status. This is just ridiculous

0:26:31.399,0:26:37.159
[AL] But I think because that privilege is so accepted, it would feel like a

0:26:37.159,0:26:41.659
threat to religious freedom. They might perceive it as a threat to religious freedom,

0:26:41.659,0:26:44.929
that we're taking away.
[GR] Well, of course it's not a threat to religious

0:26:44.929,0:26:49.279
freedom, it is a threat to religious privilege.
[AL] Well, I'll give an example. We

0:26:49.279,0:26:54.320
had a campaign recently encouraging people to write letters to their MP to support an EDM

0:26:54.320,0:26:59.779
on prayers in Parliament. And this was compared in some quarters to

0:26:59.779,0:27:05.210
the scenes you see in China, or the state bulldozing churches and the

0:27:05.210,0:27:08.629
scenes you see in Saudi Arabia, of the religious police breaking up

0:27:08.629,0:27:13.940
prayer groups in private homes, where you actually do have an

0:27:13.940,0:27:18.280
example of Christians being persecuted for praying. This is just not

0:27:18.280,0:27:24.120
having prayers as part of government.
[GR] Prayers have no place in Parliament, of any kind.

0:27:24.140,0:27:26.980
[AL] What do you think the biggest threats to freedom of and from

0:27:26.989,0:27:35.179
religion are today?
[GR] Well I think it depends where you're talking about, if I

0:27:35.179,0:27:43.909
may say so. There is no threat to religion in Britain, except for some

0:27:43.909,0:27:50.869
of the nutty DUPers and the ranters perhaps in Northern Ireland. But there is

0:27:50.869,0:27:59.210
no real threat to religion in this country. But if you look at the wider

0:27:59.210,0:28:08.539
world, yes, there is. Threats made by religious people and particularly powerful

0:28:08.539,0:28:13.690
religions. And there are threats, as we've seen, to

0:28:13.690,0:28:19.250
religions in countries where they're discriminated against. And it would take

0:28:19.250,0:28:26.390
us far too long to list those countries and those threats. I'm

0:28:26.390,0:28:38.920
constantly being sought for advice by religions that are genuine but yet have

0:28:38.920,0:28:44.660
powerful enemies and usually other religions. I have a case at the moment

0:28:44.660,0:28:54.770
where an utterly genuine religion, based mostly on Tamil people in southern India,

0:28:54.770,0:29:02.240
are being discriminated against, beaten up and so forth, by extreme Hindus

0:29:02.240,0:29:13.970
and even by some atheist groups. So, you know, you've got to accept that in the

0:29:13.970,0:29:20.840
world we have terrible examples of religious hatreds. This is why we have a

0:29:20.840,0:29:28.040
law against genocide and treat genocide as the worst crime, because that is a

0:29:28.040,0:29:37.060
crime where religious hatred usually springs out into mass murder.

0:29:37.080,0:29:42.280
[AL] Well, thank you very much for your time. But before you go we always like to ask our guests

0:29:42.290,0:29:47.180
if they have any recommendations for films or books that do a good job of

0:29:47.180,0:29:52.780
exploring religious freedom.
[GR] Ha! Well I can only recommend my own!

0:29:52.780,0:30:00.720
If you want to read about fighting militant mad Christians and Mary Whitehouse and so on

0:30:00.730,0:30:07.970
read my book either Rather His Own Man, or the earlier one, actually, has a lot on

0:30:07.970,0:30:15.820
the gay news trial. That was called The Justice Game. But, in so far as

0:30:15.820,0:30:20.830
the Catholic Church is concerned, which is a real problem

0:30:20.830,0:30:27.690
you know, Why do they have statehood? Why does this funny little enclave in Rome

0:30:27.690,0:30:36.730
claim to be a state when no one is born

in it except by accident? And why should

0:30:36.730,0:30:41.679

we allow the Catholic Church to get away with what I say is a crime against

0:30:41.679,0:30:47.710

humanity, the mass abusing of tens of thousands, if not hundreds

0:30:47.710,0:30:54.460

of thousands of mainly young boys, read The Case of the Pope. That puts the case

0:30:54.460,0:30:59.830

against the Vatican, at least, as a case of crime.

0:30:59.830,0:31:07.779

I suppose films on that subject, there's rather a good one called Mia Magna Culpa.

0:31:07.779,0:31:17.529

That's the documentary about how priests bugged small boys deaf boys, so

0:31:17.529,0:31:24.179

it was really outrageous, and how they were finally brought to justice.

0:31:24.179,0:31:30.820

There's the film Spotlight, but these Hollywood

0:31:30.820,0:31:38.220

films irritate me because they make heroes out of journalists, and

0:31:38.220,0:31:45.130

journalists, I've spent much of my life defending, are a pretty miserable lot.

0:31:45.130,0:31:51.789

They only operate, they only do their job of exposing abusers, usually, when they're

0:31:51.789,0:32:00.100

tipped off by lawyers or by courageous

victims. So I see Spotlight in that

0:32:00.100,0:32:06.960

category, as a hagiography of journalists, who don't really deserve it. They didn't

0:32:06.960,0:32:13.510

expose the situation of paedophile priests in Boston until they'd done

0:32:13.510,0:32:19.480

a lot of abusing. It was really the lawyers and and the courageous victims

0:32:19.480,0:32:26.560

who came forward
However, that's a personal complaint.

0:32:26.560,0:32:28.580

[AL] You can read our review of Spotlight

0:32:28.580,0:32:33.160

at secularism.org.uk/reviews
Geoffrey, thank you so much.

0:32:33.220,0:32:40.380

[GR] Thank you very much
[AL] I hope you enjoyed that discussion

0:32:40.380,0:32:46.360

and found it as informative as I did. Since we spoke,
it's been announced that Geoffrey will be

0:32:46.370,0:32:52.130

presenting the 2019 Secularist of the Year award. Rather than a separate event, this

0:32:52.130,0:32:57.610

will take place at a ceremony at our major upcoming conference Secularism 2019.

0:32:57.610,0:33:01.429

The award is presented annually, in recognition of an individual or

0:33:01.429,0:33:05.539

organization, considered to have made an

outstanding contribution to the

0:33:05.539,0:33:09.769

secularist movement. For example last year's winners were Phil Johnson and

0:33:09.769,0:33:13.549

Graham Sawyer, for their courageous campaigning work over many years to

0:33:13.549,0:33:17.360

expose institutional abuse of children and vulnerable adults in the Church of

0:33:17.360,0:33:22.340

England in the face of some quite fierce institutional hostility.

0:33:22.380,0:33:28.740

Secularism 2019 will take place at the Tower Hotel, in Central London on Saturday 18th May,

0:33:28.740,0:33:32.120

with a great lineup of speakers, including our keynote address from

0:33:32.120,0:33:37.250

Rachel Laser, CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and my

0:33:37.250,0:33:41.510

guest on episode 2 of the podcast. Full details and tickets are on the website

0:33:41.510,0:33:47.600

secularism.org.uk/2019

0:33:47.600,0:33:53.980

Student tickets are just £10
Member tickets £25
and non-member tickets £50

0:33:53.980,0:33:57.380

So it's really fantastic value for money. If you enjoyed

0:33:57.380,0:34:00.889

this episode please consider joining or donating to the National Secular Society

0:34:00.889,0:34:09.530

at secularism.org.uk

Until next time, thank you and goodbye.