

Newsline

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Quotes of the Week

“In truth there is no vigorous argument against radical Islam in Europe. There are individual campaigners, many of them Muslims and ex-Muslims, whose bravery astonishes me. But an 18-year-old university student will not meet an anti-Islamist political culture that would force him to think again.”

Nick Cohen, [Guardian](#).

“The church came out and said, ‘You know, this was a dark day for Ireland,’ and all you could see was literally rainbows everywhere, posters of rainbows, T-shirts of rainbows, men and women hugging, men and men hugging, women and women hugging, and yet cut to, ‘This is a dark day in the history of [Ireland]’... A dark day in the history of a country is internal civil conflict and war and bloodshed...It was a great day.”

Colin Farrell on the Irish referendum, [Attitude](#).

Essays of the Week

[Promoting Secularism in the Age of ISIS.](#)

Maryam Namazie, speech to the “Imagine No Religion” conference.

[Tradition and culture cannot justify forced marriage.](#)

Maajid Nawaz, NSS honorary associate and co-founder of the Quilliam Foundation.

[“I escaped the threat of forced marriage by my family.”](#)

Shaheen Hashmat, *Telegraph*.

Church child abuse cover-ups: Vatican justice is no justice at all

The National Secular Society has dismissed Pope Francis' new tribunal to hear the cases of bishops implicated in covering up child sex abuse as a "PR stunt" and has accused the Vatican of continuing to assist clerics escape justice over child sex abuse allegations.

NSS executive director Keith Porteous Wood insisted "Vatican justice is no justice at all" and once again reiterated the organisation's call for secular law enforcement authorities to investigate and prosecute cases against clerics involved in covering up child sex abuse cases.

Mr Wood said: "The Vatican is yet to demonstrate it has any interest in subjecting clerics suspected of child rape to justice, far less doing so for bishops who have abetted it.

"The Church, without censure from the Vatican, continues to resist every criminal or compensation case as strongly as possible, even when it knows the perpetrator to be guilty, and both shamelessly refuse to volunteer evidence of suspected guilt to secular justice authorities. This compounds the abuse of victims.

"The latest suggestion of a tribunal to make bishops more accountable is a further cynical attempt to justify them evading secular justice for child endangerment or similar offences.

"The Vatican denied extradition of former nuncio Josef Wesolowski to both his native Poland or the Dominican Republic, where he was alleged to have committed child abuse offences, on the grounds that a trial would take place in the Vatican, but presumably without prosecution witnesses. The alleged fugitive was whisked back to the Vatican out of reach of prosecutors of either country and was seen shortly afterwards walking freely around the streets of Rome.

"The landmark conviction at Pennsylvania's Supreme Court of Msgr. William J. Lynn made him the first Catholic Church official found guilty of child endangerment for his role supervising priests in the clergy sex-abuse scandal – after a rigorous defence paid for by the Catholic Church."

The tribunal comes after [strong condemnation](#) from the United Nations over the Vatican's failure to tackle child abuse and for the Church's long history of covering up the sexual abuse of children by many of its clerics.

Mr Wood added: "The Vatican has refused to implement any of the suggestions made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child relating to child abuse. This is another indication of their complete resistance to seeing justice done."

The Church tribunal will be given powers to judge bishops accused of covering up sexual abuse of minors and will fall under the authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Tristram Hunt criticises “absurdities” caused by having faith schools in the education system

Labour's Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has warned that faith schools leave little hope for an integrated education system in the UK.

Warning of the demands placed on the education system and taxpayers by religious groups, Mr Hunt wrote in the *Guardian*: "When every mosque, temple, synagogue, church, chapel and gurdwara wants its own free school, what hope have we for a national education system that integrates rather than segregates?"

He added that "one of the many absurdities" of the Government's education policy is "a school commissioning system that militates against cohesion, while demanding a unified sense of British values."

There have been repeated warnings for many years that faith schools are divisive and cause social segregation. In March 2015, a report by the Social Integration Commission called on the Department for Education to restrict new faith schools, and [warned that](#) "increased numbers of children [are] being educated in peer groups dominated by a single faith group or community".

The Shadow Education Secretary described the problems caused by religion in schools as "thorny". He said that questions of "religion, ethnicity and school provision" were even "more thorny" than serious concerns over academic attainment of pupils from white working-class backgrounds.

The shadow education secretary also criticised the DfE's plan to open a further 500 free schools in the next five years "whether needed or not".

Mr Hunt stressed the need to "be brave in challenging some of the consensus areas of education policy."

The National Secular Society welcomed Mr Hunt's comments. Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "We've long argued that the product of faith schools will be a more divided society in years to come. We are pleased to see more-and-more politicians starting to articulate this.

"The rush to open more free schools may well result in a proliferation of faith-based schools, further promoting religious polarisation and making it difficult for parents in some areas to get the secular education they expect.

"We now hope Mr Hunt's party will find the courage to review the outdated educational settlement between religion and state that channels public money into faith schools, and instead advocate for a secularised and inclusive school system free from discrimination and undue religious influence.

Mr Hunt's comments came after it emerged over the weekend that a Church of England school in Bury may face a legal challenge over its admissions policy after a complaint that it was indirectly discriminatory on grounds of race was rejected by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The Accord Coalition said that religious selection in schools can act as a "proxy for selection by race".

The 'Islamophobia' delusion

Islamists are again using the victims of anti-Muslim bigotry to advance their agenda. Once again, a British university has aided this project, this time in a conference on 'Islamophobia' which undermined and demonised ex-Muslims as "McCarthyites".

Many, many Muslims are victims of bigotry; but their suffering is being used by organised groups and campaigns to advance an Islamist agenda- enacted and expounded in 'their name', on 'their behalf', in universities across the UK- with the tacit support of many on the 'left'.

Bath University [has again](#) embarrassed itself by hosting a conference of crypto-Islamists, conspiracy theorists and the 'left-wing' fellow travellers of Islamism. Much of the conference was devoted to scaremongering about 'Islamophobia' and the demonization of ex-Muslims as "McCarthyites".

It shouldn't be forgotten that among the many victims of anti-'Muslim' bigotry are ex-Muslims, non-devout Muslims, or even Sikhs- and others who are [mistaken for Muslims](#) but have no connection whatsoever with Islam. Tackle anti-Muslim bigotry, but don't try to make out 'Islamophobia' is a bigger threat than the large minorities (and often large majorities) of Muslims around the world who hold extremely, severely regressive views. The evidence shows this is false.

Four of the attendees [wrote on OpenDemocracy](#) before the event that "the status of Muslims in the west is under threat" in an article called the "five pillars of Islamophobia".

They warn of an "increased prevalence" of "anti-Muslim hate crime". 'Islamophobia' is "deeply embedded in our politics and society" they inform us. There is a "state of hysteria about Islam", they write. They lazily use the phrase "anti-Muslim racism"- which makes as much sense as "anti-Christian racism": because in fact ["Muslims are the most ethnically diverse"](#) religion in England and Wales.

Just to give you a sense of their ideology, David Miller, one of the authors of the "five pillars" piece and organiser of the conference, [wrote in 2011](#) that Islamism (which he placed in scare quotes) was just a "catch-all term for politically active Muslims" invented or used by "conservative think tanks".

Their thesis about rising 'Islamophobia' in wider society is spurious to say the least; though there is some evidence that anti-Muslim attacks have increased, the sentiment behind them is demonstrably not widespread (as Pew found). In research conducted *since* the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*, [Pew](#) found that Europeans actually have a strongly favourable view of Muslims. 61% have a favourable view; 33% an unfavourable one. Views are even more favourable in Britain.

Despite all the talk of an 'anti-Muslim backlash', Pew found that in the UK, less than 1 in 5 people have an "unfavourable" view of Muslims (19%); compared with 37% for "Gypsies or Roma", and 7% for Jews.

Pew found that the poll ratings of Muslims [actually rose](#) in France "after *Charlie Hebdo*, just as in U.S. after 9/11". Not exactly what you would call a 'backlash'. The evidence shows that the greater "hysteria" that exists in society is about the non-phenomenon of 'Islamophobia'. Of course, the academics involved have grants to secure and career-ladders to climb, so they will continue to peddle this fashionable falsehood for as long as they can.

Let's accept their premise that 19% constitutes a "more serious problem than many writers have recognised" and that an "unfavourable" view of Muslims is a discriminatory one: though it is clearly possible to have an "unfavourable" view of any political or religious belief group without necessarily being discriminatory, much less violent, toward its members.

If 19% (at the most generous to Miller et al's theory) is a figure of reasonable concern, what other views might we trouble ourselves with that poll well above this baseline?

Is the fact that 25% of British Muslims under-34 [disagree with the statement](#) "acts of violence against those who publish images of the Prophet Mohammad can never be justified" a legitimate cause for concern? Or am I 'demonising' Muslims by raising it?

Is it 'Islamophobic' to point out that 30% of Muslims aged 18-34 have "some sympathy for the motives" behind the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*?

Equally, is it wrong to be [gravely concerned that in 2007](#) "36% of 16 to 24-year-olds believe[d] if a Muslim converts to another religion they should be punished by death", and that younger Muslims were much more likely than their parents and grandparents to take this view? 19% of over-55s also agreed with the death penalty for apostasy.

Likewise, the death penalty for apostasy [polls extremely well](#) in many Muslim-majority countries: 86% support in Egypt, 82% in Jordan, 62% in Malaysia.

Is it 'Zionist' or 'right-wing' of me to fear that no less than 37% of young British Muslims in that same poll 'preferred' to live under sharia law? (And we wonder why ISIS appeals to so many now: the base of support for a sharia-run state existed in the UK long before the Islamic State did).

Is it McCarthyite or "neo-conservative" to raise the alarm that "Muslims in Britain have zero tolerance of homosexuality", as reported in that trenchantly right-wing, Zionist publication... the [Guardian](#).

If 19% is cause for concern about the bogeyman of 'Islamophobia' (which is almost always left undefined), surely it is not wrong to also consider it problematic that 89% of Pakistanis and 55% of Bangladeshis who say Sharia should be the law of the land (84% and 82% respectively) "favour stoning as a punishment for adultery". What percentage of British Muslims of Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage share this view?

There are doubtless many British people who do hold bigoted and/or ignorant views of Muslims and [we must confront](#) those that do: [the case of ten pupils](#) prevented from attending a school trip to Exeter Mosque over their parents "safety concerns" about "terrorist groups such as ISIS" is a good example. But the research shows this to be a minority; and, crucially, a much smaller minority than

the percentage of British Muslims who hold extremely concerning views on gay people and apostates.

Islamists – pushing their 'Islamophobia' narrative- are aided by people like Deepa Kumar, an 'expert' on 'Islamophobia' and Professor of Media Studies, who was [pictured](#) at the Bath conference under a slideshow which included "Ex-Muslims and other 'native informants'" on a list of "the new McCarthyites." Attacking ex-Muslims is also an attack on non-devout, liberal and secular Muslims. As for the nasty term "native informant", I couldn't possibly critique it better than Sarah Haider of the Ex-Muslims of North America, who [has spoken out](#) on how this sinister phrase is used to marginalise ex-Muslims.

On the one hand these 'experts' warn about persecution of Muslims, on the other they collaborate to make the precarious position of apostates even more dangerous: have they no sense of decency?

Benjamin Jones is the communications officer of the National Secular Society. The views expressed in this blog may not represent the views of the NSS.

Tribunal sides with employer over Muslim who said request to wear shorter, ankle-length jilbab was “against her morals”

An Employment Appeal Tribunal has found that a Muslim woman was not discriminated against when told that her jilbab posed a tripping hazard.

A Muslim woman, named only as Ms T Begum, was offered an apprenticeship in a nursery, but was asked by a manager if she could wear a jilbab which did not extend over her feet- as it could pose a tripping hazard for children and staff.

Ms Begum had worn a jilbab during the interview which the manager said would not be suitable for working in the nursery because of its length. Instead she was asked to wear a slightly shorter garment.

Despite not objecting at the time, the claimant said that "she had been insulted" by the request and that the requirement that she wear an ankle-length jilbab, rather than one which covered her feet and touched the floor, was "against her morals and beliefs."

She claimed that she had been "discriminated against" because of her "ethnic/cultural background."

The Judge dismissed the case and noted that the woman in question "was only asked if she might wear a shorter version of the [jilbab] she wore to the interview", and was not told she could not wear the religious garment at all.

According to the ruling, "at no point was she told that she could not wear a jilbab while working at the nursery."

The Judge concluded that the policy was not "indirectly discriminatory to Muslim women" and that the health and safety policy "applied equally to staff of all religions". The Judge noted that even if the policy did "put some Muslim women at a particular disadvantage", it was a proportionate means of "protecting the health and safety of staff and children."

The ruling also pointed out the nursery employed four Muslim women who all wore hijabs, and that they were accommodated by their employer who facilitated time off for Ramadan and for prayers.

An NSS spokesperson commented, "Clearly the health and safety of staff and children is the priority here. There is not an unlimited right to manifest your religion in the workplace. The employer made a very reasonable, practical request, and we are pleased to see the Judge siding with them."

EU survey reveals clear support for labelling of meat from non-stunned animals

A survey by the European Commission has found widespread confusion over religious slaughter but clear support for labelling to indicate whether meat is from a pre-stunned animal.

The National Secular Society has reiterated its call for clearer labelling of meat, and ultimately for an end to the legal exemptions allowing religious slaughter of animals without prior stunning.

The report, on the [stunning of animals before slaughter](#), found that 45% of respondents across the EU think were in favour of different labelling on meat from animals that were not pre-stunned. Just 23% thought similar labelling should be used on meat from stunned and non-stunned animals.

Although the survey found that "animal welfare at slaughter" was not a high criterion for consumers, when directly prompted 72% said they would be interested in "receiving information on the stunning of animals at slaughter when they buy meat."

Additionally, 48% of respondents said they would look for information on "how authorities check the rules on the protection of animals at slaughter".

Shechita UK, which lobbies on behalf of the Jewish community on religious slaughter, welcomed the report and [claimed](#) that "consumers see labelling as a peripheral issue". Unsurprisingly however, the survey found that "information on pre-slaughter stunning is not an important issue [to consumers] unless brought to their attention" at which point a large percentage had concerns.

The report also found significant distinctions in opinion between consumers in Western and Eastern Europe.

The report noted that "there is little accurate consumer understanding of the slaughter process". It argued that labelling on food, allowing consumers to choose between meat from stunned or non-stunned animals, would risk that "religious groups become stigmatised."

Just 1% said "religious consideration[s]" were their "main purchase criteria" when buying meat.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "Religious considerations should not undermine animal welfare and religious groups shouldn't be exempt from animal welfare laws.

"If non-stun slaughter is allowed to continue, clearer labelling on meat products would at least allow consumers to make informed choices. There is very clear support for more information, and the report points out that there is currently limited knowledge.

"To provide choice, and the information that an overwhelming number of respondents clearly want, labelling of meat should be clarified to let people know whether meat is from a pre-stunned animal or not. That doesn't 'stigmatise' anyone.

"The feelings of some religious believers are not more important than the need to allow people to make informed, ethical choices."

The John Blackwell, president of the British Veterinary Association (BVA), said that many people were unwittingly eating meat from animals that had suffered painful deaths because they had not

been stunned. He said that failing to label unstunned meat "takes away the individual's right to make an informed decision".

Both the BVA and National Secular Society campaign for an end to the exemption allowing religious groups to slaughter animals without first stunning them.

Tribunal finds that Christian nursery worker was victim of religious discrimination

An employment tribunal has found that an evangelical Christian woman working at a nursery in Highbury, north London was a victim of religious discrimination after she was fired for upsetting a lesbian colleague. The verdict undermines claims from Christian activists that Christians are not protected from discrimination when their rights come into conflict with gay rights.

The case was brought by Sarah Mbuyi, with support from the Christian Legal Centre. Ms Mbuyi, who worked at Newpark Childcare upset her co-worker - when they got into a conversation about Ms Mbuyi's religious attitudes to her colleague's relationship.

Ms Mbuyi's colleague asked her whether her church would accept her and her partner, and was upset when Ms Mbuyi said it would not and that such an arrangement went against her Christian beliefs. "God does not condone the practice of homosexuality, but does love you and says you should come to Him as you are," Ms Mbuyi said. She told her colleague that she was a sinner - "but we are all sinners".

The colleague was distressed by this and requested a transfer to another department in the nursery - but she did not make any allegations against Ms Mbuyi or lodge any complaint. Nevertheless, the management of the nursery began a disciplinary action against Ms Mbuyi.

The tribunal heard that at the disciplinary hearing there was no evidence that the colleague had been systematically harassed by Ms Mbuyi. It was also apparent that she had initiated the conversation that had prompted Ms Mbuyi's remarks.

The managers of the nursery had asked Ms Mbuyi at the disciplinary whether she thought the colleague was "wicked" and Ms Mbuyi replied "yes, but we are all wicked". This was subsequently cited as one of the comments made to the colleague which had caused her distress, but it had actually been made only in the disciplinary hearing.

They also asked her whether she would be prepared to read a story to children that featured a gay couple. Ms Mbuyi said no she wouldn't, she would ask a colleague to read it.

Previously Ms Mbuyi had given the colleague a Bible and had brought other religious books into work with her.

The tribunal found that the nursery had acted on the basis of "stereotyped ideas of evangelical Christianity". But it did say that if the nursery had asked both Ms Mbuyi and the colleague not to talk about their religious beliefs or their sexuality in the workplace again and either of them had refused, it would have been grounds for dismissal.

As it was, Ms Mbuyi was dismissed on the basis of the colleague's version of events alone and no further investigation was undertaken, and this procedural shortcoming of the employer was a key factor in the decision to uphold Ms Mbuyi's complaint.

Ms Mbuyi now has another job and told the Sunday Times: "I only ever responded to questions that my colleague asked me, and wanted the very best for her. I hope that my previous employer and colleagues are well and will understand from this that my intention was for the best."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "This was not a case of Christianophobia which the Christian Legal Centre is so intent on insisting is widespread. The judgment stated: "None of the claimants treatment was because she was a Christian". This case therefore throws a spanner in the works of the Christian Legal Centre's narrative that Christians are not protected from discrimination at work, particularly when they come into conflict with gay people. It shows that the equality laws are working properly and that Christians that have a genuine grievance (rather than the hair-trigger persecution narrative that the Christian Legal Centre usually deals in) will be treated justly by the law.

"Although we think the tribunal came to the right decision in this case, it does illustrate that when people try to evangelise in the workplace it can so easily lead to conflict with colleagues. It is significant that Ms Mbuyi was thought by some fellow employees to be too ready to "look for opportunities to share her faith when she felt she was being invited to do so".

"Andrea Minichiello Williams of the Christian Legal Centre thinks Christians should have the right to disregard workplace rules simply because they have a strong faith. But some people get angry or distressed when zealous colleagues subject them to religious pressure. This was illustrated clearly by the [recent case of Victoria Wastoney](#).

"It is now time for the Christian Legal Centre to admit that the equality law is fair to Christians. It should restrict the cases it brings to those that have genuine merit and involve real discrimination.

"We also regret that the Tribunal took notice of the Council of Europe's [resolution](#) (pdf) calling on member states to challenge discrimination on grounds of religion – particularly against Christians. But it probably had no bearing on the tribunal outcome. It is not law, simply a non-binding resolution on Member States to "uphold freedom of conscience in the workplace while ensuring that access to services provided by law is maintained and the right of others to be free from discrimination is protected. However the Mbuyi case does not create a precedent."

You can read the judgment [here](#).

Australian Catholic schools criticised for distributing anti equal marriage propaganda

The Catholic Church has sent a booklet entitled "Don't Mess With Marriage" to 56 primary and secondary schools in Australia, prompting criticism from Australian secularists.

The letter is described as "a robust defence" of traditional marriage and [ABC reports](#) that the booklet has now been sent home with 25,000 students in Catholic schools.

The document says that homosexuality is a "real trial" for gay people and that the Church faces a "struggle for the very soul of marriage."

Scott Hedges, founder of the Australian ["Fairness in Religions in Schools"](#) campaign, denounced the letter, not least because he said "Catholic schools in Australia are largely state funded."

He added, "If the Catholic Church insists on using its publicly funded schools to advocate for policies that are at odds with the civil rights of Australian citizens, these same citizens have a right to question how their money is spent."

The letter, sent from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, says that gay marriage is 'destabilising' and undermines the "common good."

The bishops wrote, "'Messing with marriage'... is also 'messing with kids'. It is gravely unjust to them."

The letter also argues that same-sex marriage is "not fair or just" to gay people.

Mr Hedges added: "The Catholic Church wants to take money from the people, but it doesn't want any conditions placed on it. The people of Australia cannot continue to pay for an education system that has, at its core, an ideology that is at odds with their values."

He said that the decision by the Bishops Conference to use its state funded schools as a "distribution network for a political campaign" against same-sex marriage is a "clear example" of why there should be a "more principled understanding of secularism in the Commonwealth."

"While it is within the remit of the Catholic Church to insist that its followers remain celibate and single if God has made them gay, it is also well within the rights of Australians to demand that its government not support these same institutions.

"Australians anticipate their government following the lead of the Irish Parliament, and when that happens, the Australian Church may have to decide if its stance on gay marriage is more valuable than its money."

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott is against gay marriage and has refused calls for Australia to hold a referendum on the issue. He has described himself as "the last holdout for the traditional position" on marriage.

Commenting on the "Don't Mess With Marriage" document after its publication, Archbishop Christopher Prowse compared same-sex marriage to ecological disaster: "We talk about preserving the Great Barrier Reef and the ecological treasures that we have... this is the great human treasure, family."

He also claimed that debates about same-sex marriage were "one-sided".

Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher added: "Surely there are other ways of honouring the friendships of same-sex attracted and other people without further deconstructing marriage and the family."

Bishop Gregory O'Kelly, speaking on the definition of marriage, said: "The opinions of media personalities, or politicians, or a parliamentary vote can do what they wish, but no matter how much they say it, a pear remains a pear and does not change into an apple".

In 2012 the UK's Catholic Education Service (CES) was [rebuked](#) for blurring the distinction between faith and politics in schools after the National Secular Society accused it of [abusing its authority](#) by contacting Catholic schools asking them to tell pupils about a political campaign against equal marriage. Legislation to allow same-sex marriage in England and Wales was subsequently passed in July 2013.

Following the result of the recent Irish referendum which approved same-sex marriage by a very large margin, the Catholic Church has doubled-down on its opposition to marriage equality.

The Church in Ireland [threatened](#) before the vote to stop the registration of all civil marriages if the Ireland voted in favour of marriage equality. The move was condemned as a "[crude strategy to frighten people](#)", but speaking last week, the president of the Irish bishops' conference, Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh said it was "not yet certain" that Catholic priests will be able to continue presiding at civil marriages.

The Vatican's Secretary of State Cardinal, Pietro Parolin, described Ireland's referendum result as a "defeat for humanity. However, since same sex marriage was overwhelmingly approved, one Catholic cleric in Ireland [said](#) the Church needed a "reality check". The Archbishop of Dublin added that "the Church has to find a new language which will be understood and heard by people."

Also see: [Colin Farrell mocks Catholic Church's reaction to equal marriage defeat](#)

Northern Ireland anti-abortion measure “strongly supported” by religious groups

A coalition of religious groups offered 'strong support' to proposed legislation in Northern Ireland which would have introduced a ten year prison sentence for carrying out an abortion.

The penalty would have applied to independent abortion providers in Northern Ireland such as Marie Stopes, and would have effectively limited services to NHS hospitals- where they would be restricted.

Groups supportive of the measure included "CARE, the Christian Medical Fellowship, Evangelical Alliance, Precious Life, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, Women's Network, the Northern Catholic Bishops, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Free Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland."

Alastair Ross MLA, Chairperson of the Committee for Justice, who moved the amendment, said, "the main points in support of the amendment included the argument that life begins at the moment of conception."

While noting their opposition to abortion, Sinn Fein said the proposal was "clearly an attempt to restrict the right of a woman to obtain a termination in life-threatening circumstances."

The party added that the amendment was "an attempt to further compound trauma by marginalising women at a time in [their lives] when [they] are most vulnerable. The criminal justice arena is not a place to deal with a sensitive health care issue such as this."

Trevor Lunn MLA of the Alliance Party commented that the amendment caused "equal concern to those of us who are pro-choice and pro-life." He added that he was "uncomfortable with the notion that an Assembly dominated by men should dictate in these matters."

He also questioned the parameters of the motion as written, and queried whether "the mother of a young pregnant girl, who cooperates with her daughter in arranging a termination" would be in breach of the law if her daughter was under the age of consent.

There was even a suggestion that the amendment would have restricted the use of the morning-after pill and made it difficult for independent organisations to offer it.

The motion was blocked, and a petition of concern was lodged against it. The DUP had said that the amendment was "doomed to fail" because of the petition of concern.

NSS Speaks Out:

NSS executive director Keith Porteous Wood was quoted in the [Telegraph](#) criticising the Pope's plans to create a tribunal to hear the cases of bishops accused of covering up child sex abuse. Our full response can be seen above.

The NSS was also quoted in the [Catholic Herald](#) on religious persecution, in an article on why "Catholics must stick up for atheists".

NSS president Terry Sanderson was mentioned in the [Sunday Times](#), which noted our report on the case of a Christian nursery worker found to have been wrongly sacked. He pointed out that the case demonstrated that Christians are also protected by equality laws. We were also quoted in [Christian Today](#) and [Ekklesia](#) on this story.

Campaigns manager Stephen Evans was quoted in the [Mid Devon Gazette](#), after Tiverton Town Council voted to hold prayers during official meetings- over the objections of some councillors.

Since last week's Newslines, our response to Tony Blair's proposals on anti-Semitism and holocaust denial was also picked up by both the [Economist](#) and [Christian Today](#).

Upcoming Events:

For a full listing of all upcoming events see the [NSS website](#).

[The Equality Act 2010: five-years on](#)

Date: Monday 22 June

Venue: University of Chester

Tickets: Solicitor/Barrister/Practitioner rate - £175 | Academics/Union Member rate - £75 | Voluntary Sector Employee/Student rate - £25

Details: The Forum for Research into Equality and Diversity, University of Chester, in collaboration with the School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool present a one-day conference:

Keynote speakers are: Professor Sir Bob Hepple QC, FBA Emeritus Master of Clare College, and Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Cambridge and Colm O'Conneide, Reader in Law at University College London.

Papers will also be presented on a range of themes around the Equality Act 2010 including race discrimination, religion and belief discrimination, age discrimination, positive action, the Public Sector Equality Duty etc.

To book places, please use the [online booking form](#). The deadline for payment and registration is the 3 June 2015.

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