

# NSS launches No to Council Prayers campaign

 In a campaign that is generating a great deal of media interest, the National Secular Society has challenged Bideford Council in Devon with the threat of a judicial review over its practice of including prayers as part of its council meeting agenda.

Our challenge follows an approach from local Councillor Clive Bone, whose motions to the council to remove prayers from the agenda have failed, despite the Council being warned by the National Association of Local Councils that continuing prayers could fall foul of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Clive Bone was not the only councillor at Bideford feeling uncomfortable about the saying of prayers. He also told us he knew that the practice deterred potential councillors from seeking office, thus undermining local democracy. Councillor Bone had also been criticised for not attending a civic remembrance service in the local

church, even though he had attended the preceding war memorial ceremony. His attempts to stop prayers had been made over several years and he had the support of local secularists. In an attempt to make a breakthrough he asked the NSS for help – and as this is a secular issue, concerning the separation of religion from politics, we were happy to become involved. We sought a legal opinion which also confirmed that the practice was very likely to be illegal on several grounds. Late last year, solicitors acting on our behalf wrote to the Council setting out these grounds and asking them to stop the prayers. They did not even receive an acknowledgement.

The town clerk responded defiantly: “This is not a local issue but a national one, and there are many types of council in England who practice the same. Until such times as this Council either resolves to dispense with prayers or is

**continues on page 2, col 1 ▶**

## Your help is needed!

**The NSS is launching a fighting fund to help us bring this crucial test case which could have a nationwide effect to the High Court and possibly to higher courts and to help fund other challenges when appropriate. You can make a donation to this fund using your credit card securely at [www.secularism.org.uk/donate.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/donate.html) or by sending a cheque made out to “NSS” to NSS Fighting Fund, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL (an SAE is enclosed for members). Any money raised and not used in this campaign will be used to fund NSS campaigns in future.**

## POPE VISIT PROTEST:

# Our 28,000 petition hits home



**NSS President Terry Sanderson presenting the petition to Number 10**

 When the Pope's visit to the UK was announced, the NSS response was swift. Our plans to launch a large-scale campaign of protest against the publicly-funded state visit of the Pope were widely reported and within hours we had established an online petition that was so successful it made news around the world.

In just three weeks 28,000 supporters had signed up, objecting to the visit being a “state” (as opposed to pastoral) one and calling on the Prime Minister to make the Catholic Church pay for the visit and

**continues on page 2, col 3 ▶**

### ◀“Council prayers” continued

advised through Government that this practice is illegal it will continue to retain the *status quo*.” Each public body is responsible for complying with the law, though, so in this sense it is not a national matter. However if we are successful, it will have national implications as the majority of the many thousands of local authorities do say prayers.

### “Attack on freedom”

Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury fulminated that this was “an attack on freedom”, according to prominent articles in the *Mail* and the *Guardian*. This closely followed his former grace Lord Carey calling for special panels to try Christian cases. He did this in an intervention in the Gary McFarlane v. Relate case, and was ridiculed for doing so by Lord Justice Laws. Given he is a practising Anglican, the rebuke should have stung Carey all the more. We see both of Carey’s interventions as further steps in a sinister campaign with evangelical lawyers to once again give Christian conscience, and Christianity itself, a privileged position in the law. The National Secular Society will do everything in its power to prevent this.

Our challenge was also reported by the BBC on Radio 4 news, regional TV, local radio and its website. But, already, local clergyman Paul Martin, a Methodist minister who has occasionally conducted the prayers, has just announced that he will no longer continue to do so unless they are separated from council business. On his blog, Mr Martin said that there should be no compulsion in religion and he had no desire to foist prayers on those who do not want them. He recalled that prayers were not said when he served on Redruth Council,

dispelling any suggestion that such practices form an indispensable part of the democratic process.

It cannot be said we are restricting freedom of worship; councillors are as free as anyone else to worship. As Clive Bone said to the BBC: “Religious worship is a fundamental human right, but so is procreation and people do not take that into the council chamber”. On top of that, we would not object if prayers were held before council meetings or afterwards, preferably in a separate room.

### “No plans to issue guidance”

Bideford tried to call our bluff by suggesting that their local MP (a QC) had raised the matter in Parliament and that the “outcome was that the saying of prayers at the commencement of meetings was not illegal”. Yet the only evidence we could find was that this MP had asked a Parliamentary Question and been told by the relevant minister: “The Department has no plans to issue guidance to local authorities on prayers at council meetings.”

Given this *impasse* our solicitors have now sent Bideford a letter ahead of action. Bideford will have to decide whether to continue and fight our challenge or change its practice. If it does not fight our challenge we will find another council that will. The Mayor wants to continue prayers, but does not want Bideford’s taxpayers to pay to defend the Judicial Review; he is “sure there will be plenty of people who will want to pay to fight this on our behalf”. We are aware of another council, one of whose councillors objects to his council’s prayers and homily which last ten minutes.

Any councillor wishing for their council to be a test case is welcome to contact us.

### ◀“Pope visit” continued

relieve the taxpayer of the cost, which we estimated at £20 million. The President handed the petition in to 10 Downing Street in person together with a delegation from the NSS.

We are pleased to report that Catholics are now desperately trying to raise funds to cover the pastoral aspect of the visit and even the *Catholic Herald* and Damian Thompson, the most extreme pro-Catholic commentator, are now suggesting the visit should be a pastoral, as opposed to a state one.

Despite the NSS’s £20 million conservative estimate of the costs being ridiculed as a massive overstatement, it is likely that we have underestimated them. They are said to be £15 million but this excludes policing costs which are likely to be massive, given the multiple locations, the requirement that events be ticket-only, and raised tensions from the near-daily diet of child abuse revelations.

In a desperate attempt to derail this latest NSS coup, the Labour Government once more resorted to fantasy, for want of a credible counter-argument. We understand that Jim Murphy, Secretary of State for Scotland at the time and organiser-in-chief for the Pope’s visit told a named journalist that our petition was swollen by fictitious names – such as Mickey Mouse. Before submitting the petition, however, we had removed the very few of such signatures that there were.

Given the massive and instant response to the petition, the (Labour) Government was formally obliged to respond to it. And the task fell to Mr Murphy who must have replied through gritted teeth. He wrote that, while he “understood” our concerns about the cost to the taxpayer, the visit would bring “significant benefits to the UK, principally through the strengthening of our relationship with the Holy See”. As usual, the Government was so anxious to support religion it went into delusion mode. Gordon Brown went even further than his colleague. The visit would be a “moving and momentous occasion for the whole country”, he said. He topped even that a few days later by asserting it would “be

## National

# Ex-archbishop intervenes in council prayers battle

**Secular society plans human rights test case**  
Carey claims legal threat is attack on freedom

Steven Morris

The former archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, yesterday backed the saying of prayers before council meetings as a pressure group prepared to launch a legal battle on the issue. He said he believed the action against Bideford town council in north Devon was an “attack on freedom”. The National Secular Society has intervened in a long-running controversy over the saying of prayers at Bideford and is to seek a judicial review, arguing the practice breaches the European convention

on human rights. It hopes that if it wins its case, hundreds of other councils will be forced to stop prayers. Carey said: “The centuries-long tradition of saying of prayers before council meetings is simply an acknowledgment of the important role the Christian faith plays in civic life. The attempt to rule such prayers as discriminatory is an attack on freedom and a cynical manoeuvre to drive public expressions of faith from national as well as local life. This should not be a matter for the courts as concerns democratic freedoms. Councillors can halt the practice of saying prayers through a vote rather than resorting to judicial means.” Bishop Bob Eves, the bishop of Crediton, north Devon, added: “The saying of prayers before meetings is an integral part of the British system of government.” But the NSS insists it will not retreat. It says that if Bideford backs down, it will

focus on another council until it brings a test case that it hopes will bring the practice to an end for ever. The Bideford prayers saga has been long-running and often bitter. Councillor Clive Bone and others have twice tried to halt prayers but been outvoted. Bone says the issue reached a crisis in November when he and another councillor were criticised by a Christian member, Tony Inch, for not attending a remembrance service at St Mary’s church (Bone had attended the parade and the two minutes’ silence at the war memorial). He had spoken to the NSS shortly before the remembrance row and the criticism appears to have prompted him to redouble his efforts. “My objection to prayers is that local authorities are public bodies set up for public purposes and are not private clubs,” he said. “Local government should be inclusive and not just for particular types of people. Prayers are an embarrassing turnoff and

I know people that might have become council candidates but are put off by prayers. In that respect prayers corrode democracy.” The NSS has been appealing for people to find out if prayers are being said at their local council. Around half of the 120 authorities it lists on its website still say prayers. Keith Porteous Wood, the NSS executive director, said its lawyers believe the practice in Bideford is a breach of the European convention, which not only guarantees freedom to manifest religion, but also freedom from religion. He said: “Council-

It is not appropriate for prayers to form an integral part of the council meeting”  
...ors can, like anyone else, go to church or pray at home whenever they wish, and indeed we do not have a problem with them praying separately before or after council meetings. But it is not appropriate in modern-day Britain for prayers to form an integral part of the council meeting.” In Bideford, Inch believes the town is being picked on because it does not have the resources to defend itself. “They are trying to use us as a test case,” he said. Inch said councillors who did not want to take part in prayers could “wedge their thumbs” while prayers took place. The mayor of Bideford, Andy Powell (an agnostic), is more conciliatory, suggesting replacing the practice with a silence that members can fill with prayers or secular thoughts. He wishes the issue would go away and allow the council to focus on boosting tourism, backing regeneration projects, providing litter and dog mess bins and maintaining St Mary’s church clock.

a time of joy for people of all faiths and none.” The Conservative and LibDem leaders also welcomed the visit.

Many secularists, even religious ones, will be less pleased, and we understand that quite a few Catholics are unenthusiastic. Some are livid about the Church’s lamentable failures over child abuse, and the Pope’s role in this. To maximise the impact of the many small specialist groups making a stand against a state visit by the Pope, sometimes for different reasons, the Society is backing the Protest the Pope campaign. The

campaign is likely to be the focus of joint events.

The first Protest the Pope event took place in March outside Westminster Cathedral, Britain’s main Catholic church. The lively protest was greeted by a mixture of jeers and support from Catholic congregants leaving the Cathedral after Palm Sunday mass. It helped reinforce in the Government’s mind that dissent is going to be evident. News of future events will be published in *Newsline*, on our website and on the [ProtestthePope](#) website. We urge as many of our members as possible to get involved

to ensure that the Pope’s doctrinaire, bigoted and dangerous views do not go unchallenged when he is here from 16–19 September 2010.

More importantly, newspaper reports of a [leaked Government report](#) on the Pope’s visit contained a list of what were described as “negative influences” on the visit. While types of groups – such as abuse organisations – were identified, only one organisation was named: the NSS. That is a badge to be worn with pride and is testament to the efficacy of our work in this area.

# A further attack on RC child abuse at UN

Keith Porteous Wood [escalated his attack](#) on the Vatican’s appalling record on child abuse by speaking out at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) at Geneva in March.

The Papal Nuncio sat stony-faced through the attack and we saw him discussing [our intervention](#) with his assistant, poring over the written version.

We made even more serious accusations than in our [previous intervention](#) in September 2009, in effect placing the blame squarely with the Pope. We pointed out that the Vatican had still failed to file a woefully-overdue report with the UN dealing with child abuse, despite a specific undertaking in September to do so.

Despite the accusations, and attendant humiliation, the Vatican decided against exercising any Right of Reply. It was anxious not to repeat the media debacle that followed its disingenuous reply to Keith’s previous intervention in September. Even at that point it did not deny our allegations.

The Vatican is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Our accusations include that the Vatican is in contravention of several of the Convention’s articles, and that it is more than 10 years behind in its reporting.



It has habitually compounded the abuse and facilitated multiple reoffending by moving abusive priests around and shielding them from prosecuting authorities by imposing the “pontifical secret”. Major investigations in the USA and Ireland have been deliberately and cynically obstructed by the Church at all levels without censure from above. This includes the Vatican’s representative in Ireland, suggesting that he acted under instruction from the highest level ‘for the good of the universal Church’. All this has led to abusers being allowed to continue offending and to escape justice, while their victims despair – some even committing suicide.

Keith, speaking for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), said: “The Church unreasonably claims it is being victimised. It still places the protection of its reputation, and

even more its assets, above the protection of those entrusted to its care. The lion’s share of the compensation payments paid by cash-strapped Ireland came from the tax payers, including the abused themselves.

“When we raised this issue at the UN in September 2009, the Church blamed everyone but itself. But it did promise to include *one* paltry paragraph on clerical abuse in its report to the UN. Even that mandatory report — already 13 years overdue and promised last September — has still not been filed.” In his latest intervention, Keith called on the Holy See to:

1. remove its reservation to the CRC to bring the territory of Vatican City state, to which it has instructed all abuse accusations are to be sent, under the jurisdiction of the CRC,
2. open up its files and records to the CRC and state investigators, and
3. instruct all its representatives to cooperate with legal investigating authorities worldwide, something that they have signally failed to do, for example, in Ireland.

The NSS and IHEU’s intervention had been planned long before the recent almost daily diet of adverse worldwide publicity for the Vatican but can only have helped to raise awareness and feed the momentum.

## Honorary Associates in the Commons – Evan Harris and Paul Holmes lose seats

Honorary Associate and recent winner of the Secularist of the Year prize Dr Evan Harris lost Oxford West and Abingdon by 176 votes in a seat which had become more difficult to win because of boundary changes. His defeat followed smear campaigns by religious opponents, especially those opposed to assisted dying, and by animal rights activists. His seat went to a member of the Conservative Christian Fellowship. We are immensely grateful to Evan for his unstinting and hugely effective support for secularism and hope that he will be back in Parliament at the first opportunity.



Dr Evan Harris

Honorary Associate Paul Holmes, also a LibDem, lost his Chesterfield seat for need of only around 500 votes to Labour. Before Paul, Tony Benn had held this Constituency for 17 years. We are grateful to Paul too as we are to Robert (Bob) Marshall-Andrews QC and Colin Challen who also stood down.



Paul Holmes

We are pleased to report that Graham Allen and Joan Ruddock both retained their seats. They are on the Labour benches.

## MEDIA

It has been a busy time for the NSS in the media. Our high profile in print, on radio and on TV brings us many new members as well as promoting the secular message and providing balance to the many religious voices. Often we are the story (such as in Council prayers), the source of a major story or sole commentators making the secular argument. We regularly feature on the BBC, both national and regional, as well as on other major channels and on foreign stations. We have been quoted in all of the major newspapers and many local ones as well as newspapers and major websites abroad, including Agence France Presse and in America, Ireland, France, Spain, South Africa and Singapore

The imminent visit of the Pope and our petition sparked a great deal of media interest. Both Keith and Terry have worked hard to provide comment on other major issues, including the Equality Bill, religious people trying to get exemptions from uniform rules, sex education and caste discrimination. Faith schools continue to be a major source of our comments. The NSS is regularly quoted in all the main newspapers as well as local and foreign publications. Terry continues to write his widely-read Comment is Free column in the *Guardian*, which always sets off a heavyweight debate. In addition to Keith and Terry, staff members Stephen Evans and Tessa Kendall were interviewed on a range of subjects – and took the brunt when Keith and Terry were in the USA.

The NSS also spoke out about council prayers, Catholic adoption agencies, the Christian B&Bs refusing to take gay couples, the absurdity of evangelical Christians claiming they are victims of our laws, religious opt-outs for pharmacists and on the successive outrages emanating from the Vatican.

## UN Special Rapporteur to retire

While in Geneva for the UNHRC session, the NSS thanked Special Rapporteur on Religion and Belief Mrs Asma Jahangir formally at a farewell discussion as her final term expires.

In her valedictory speech, Mrs Jahangir drew attention to the adverse effect on women of religion and tradition, and expressed her concern about the spread of Sharia. She was disturbed about growing religious intolerance, noting it was not confined to nations with poor education. She observed that the attempts to introduce defamation of religions legislation was most enthusiastically supported by countries with poor human rights records themselves.

Keith paid tribute to this brave campaigner for Human Rights. The NSS was proud to have facilitated her making an address (in June 2008) to the European Parliament, similar to those made by heads of state – one of the few, and perhaps the only, woman to do so.



Keith Porteous Wood with Mrs Asma Jahangir

# Secularist of the Year

The £5,000 Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year was won this year by [Southall Black Sisters](#), who provide a secular space for women fleeing violence or injustice — often resulting from religious attitudes. Its Director, Pragna Patel, said in her acceptance speech: “If you had asked me 20 years ago what one of the biggest struggles would be in 2010, I would not have said the struggle for a secular society. Yet here we are today.”

A special campaigning award was presented to Samantha Stein for setting up Camp Quest, the UK’s first residential summer camp to offer children an alternative to the usual religious camps, where they can be taught the value of rational thought and scientific enquiry. Dennis Penaluna was awarded Volunteer of the Year for his work on the Hospital Chaplains campaign.

Special guests included former winners Lord Avebury and Dr Evan Harris, Ariane Sherine, Professor Pete Atkins, Lord (Dick) Taverne and Baroness Turner.

Entertainment was provided by member (and allegedly a Rev Dr.) Peter Hearty, resplendent in clerical garb who read out, to much amusement, contenders for the most platitudinous *Thought for the Day* prize. As the winner was not on hand to receive the prize – a full set of Richard Dawkins books, signed by the author – Peter put them up on eBay and donated the proceeds to the NSS. The winner, by the way, was the “Awfully Reverend James Jones, Lord Bishop of Liverpool and Bishop of Prisons”. Anne Atkins came a close second.

Guests were also treated to a magician doing tricks at their tables. The event – held in a glamorous West End venue – was judged by guests to be the best yet. It was organised by Terry Sanderson with help from Stephen Evans and Tessa Kendall and compered by Keith Porteous Wood.

We thank Dr Irwin for his great generosity in sponsoring the prize again.



The 'Rev Dr' Peter Hearty



Dr Michael Irwin



Ariane Sherine



Sam Stein with Terry Sanderson



Pragna Patel



Dennis Penaluna



Keith Wood with Pragna Patel and family

# NSS battles over Equality Bill (now Act)

🚫 The Labour Government pushed the Equality Bill through Parliament at breakneck speed in an endeavour to ensure it reached the statute book more or less intact before the general election. This restricted our ability to table as many amendments as we would have liked, apart from caste (as reported below).

## Intensive lobbying

The NSS has been engaged in an intensive period of parliamentary lobbying on the Equality Bill. We have consulted with Conservative, Labour, Lib Dem and cross bench parliamentarians as well as being involved in negotiations with the (then) Labour Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

In January, the religious lobby in the House of Lords inflicted three humiliating defeats on the Labour Government over religious exemptions in the Equality Bill. As so often, the bishops voted to further their own interests.

They played a leading role in removing even limited protection on the employment of homosexuals in religious organisations and a requirement to be proportional in exemptions from discrimination law. The religious lobby voted in the full

knowledge that what they were voting for was contrary to the EU Employment Directive, which the UK is legally bound to observe. As a result, the deficiencies in the previous legislation pointed out by the European Commission in its [Reasoned Opinion](#) (following a complaint by the NSS in 2004) have not been rectified.

One of these three crucial votes made Parliamentary history that would sadden any secularist. The vote was actually carried by the bishops; the Government lost by five votes, with [eight bishops](#) voting against the Labour Government.

## Undemocratic behaviour

The bishops' irresponsible, undemocratic behaviour provides yet a further justification for the Bench of Bishops to be removed.

The Brown Government was so in thrall to the religious lobby that it dared not admit it was using the Bill to bring the law into line with the EU Directive. Indeed, the Leader of the House of Lords even went so far as to assert in the Chamber that the Commission was mistaken in stating that the (Labour) Government had agreed to do so.

Keith Porteous Wood commented: "The Labour Government's defeat in

the Equality Bill demonstrates just how strong the religious lobby is in the House of Lords.

## Whims and demands

"This should have taught the Government that it gets nothing in return for its policy of indulging the whims and demands of the religious lobby, even the Anglican Church.

**"The UK is the *only* western democracy giving clerics the right to sit in their legislature. The new Government's plans to reform the House of Lords must also include the removal of the Bench of Bishops. The bishops are self-serving and undemocratic, not even representative of those in their Church, far less of the UK or even England. It would be the very antithesis of modernisation to make an exception to an elected House and retain this undemocratic, absurd, archaic anachronism.**

**And, on the subject of archaic anachronisms, the Government should reflect carefully on the whole issue of disestablishment. They should bring this issue before Parliament, rather than, as the previous Government did, claim that it will only do so if the Church requests it, something it will never be in its interests to do."**

---

# Caste: discrimination to be illegal

The House of Lords adopted an amendment to the Equality Bill (now Act) paving the way for caste discrimination to be made illegal. This follows extensive NSS lobbying for legal protection from discrimination on the grounds of caste. We played a leading role at the first international conference on untouchability in London last summer where caste discrimination was the sole topic. This was hosted by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the international umbrella group to which we are affiliated.

Caste discrimination provisions were not in the original draft of the Bill, and the leading Hindu organisations had claimed that discrimination was not a problem in Britain – despite substantial evidence to the contrary.

Prime movers of the Bill in the Lords were Lord Avebury and Honorary Associate Baroness Flather. The former Bishop of Oxford, Lord Harries, was also a sponsor. Also active in bringing about this success have been NSS Honorary Associates Lord Desai, Baroness Turner and

especially Dr Evan Harris, as well as Lord Lester of Herne Hill, QC. We thank them all. We also thank the Labour Government – particularly Baroness Thornton – for listening to the case we made. She convened a meeting of interested groups, and was clearly moved by the testimonies of those suffering the discrimination that had spread with the diaspora from India.

Keith commented: "This victory is historic; the UK is the first western country to pass such legislation. I hope it will encourage other states where caste discrimination is practised to do likewise. The victory is especially poignant because, even after several months of our campaigning, both the (Labour) Government and Equality and Human Rights Commission seemed implacably opposed to our proposals.

"We are privileged, and indeed proud, to have been influential in bringing about one of those all-too-rare occasions when Parliament was visibly moved by the quality of debate to change its mind."



Baroness Flather

# New Board promises a leading role in Brussels

The Society has been appointed to the newly-formed Advisory Board of the European Parliamentary Platform for Secularism in Politics. This follows our working closely with Honorary Associate Sophie in 't Veld MEP for many years on secular matters and on the Platform's predecessor body. Elizabeth O'Casey, Stephen Evans or Keith Porteous Wood represent the Society at the meetings in Brussels.



Stephen Evans



Elizabeth O'Casey,

## Faith and belief group

The NSS was invited to make a presentation about the work of the NSS to civil servants in the Department of Health. Keith spoke to employees in London and was relayed interactively to the Leeds office so employees there could participate. His presentation was followed by questions and a dynamic discussion. It was the best attended of the series so far, and was enthusiastically received by participants.

## Submissions

We recently submitted a consultation on SRE (sex education), which should become compulsory in all schools, but former Minister Ed Balls caved in to pressure from religious groups to permit faith schools to teach according to their 'ethos'. The Conservatives also intend to let schools decide what will be taught.

We are pleased to report that a submission we made last year has resulted in ancient remains at Avebury remaining there for scientific enquiry and public interest rather than being given to Druids after they made entirely unfounded claims about their religious rights to them.

## Other Council activities

Peter Vlachos has continued to represent the Society at ongoing representations and meetings with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the Religion and Belief Consultancy Group. Anglicans and Catholics walked out of the Group, apparently because they did not think they were getting their way enough. This, and our criticism of their tactics, was reported in *The Times*. Peter also responded to the Chartered Management Institute on chaplains in the workplace.

Elizabeth O'Casey gave a talk to the Enfield Young Conservatives and attended a conference at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law on "Islamic Law Before the Courts". She has prepared briefing notes on Sharia law and is one of our representatives for meetings in the European Parliament in Brussels.



Peter Vlachos

# NSS at the American Atheist Convention in New York

NSS President Terry Sanderson and Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood flew the secularist flag high at the American Atheists' annual convention on blasphemy in March.

Terry Sanderson spoke on the abolition of the UK blasphemy laws and the NSS's prominent role in bringing that about. His talk was illustrated by the film he had compiled on our blasphemy abolition campaign and the following celebrations, including Sir Ian McKellen reciting the poem which triggered the last "successful" prosecution.

Keith Porteous Wood told his enthusiastic audience about the power of the Catholic Church and the privileges it gains from being a sovereign state while minimising its accountability – which was news to many in the audience. He observed that the most damaging of the privileges is access to the UN, given the agenda the Vatican pursues – particularly in relation to contraception



with its implications for world population, women's health, poverty and AIDS.

He also pointed to concordats – treaties between the Vatican and other states to cement privileges for the church. As international treaties, they are all too often passed secretly or without being subject to the rigours of the democratic process. Democratically elected officials

are threatened with sanctions, even excommunication, for not slavishly following Vatican dogma.

Keith showed how the Vatican exploited bankruptcy law by letting dioceses go bankrupt and how they avoid their compensation liabilities to abuse victims. He also described the unconventional *modus operandi* of the Unicredit Bank which is no stranger to accusations of money laundering.

The packed audience applauded heartily and many expressed their gratitude for our work, especially at the UN.

## Donations

The NSS Council would like to thank the many members who have made donations so far this year, particularly the most generous ones of £5,000 and £2,500. More and more members are taking out standing orders and we are grateful to them for providing us with this regular income and a solid basis for planning our campaigns.

If you would like to make a donation, start or increase a standing order or remember the NSS in your will to guarantee our work continues into the future, please click the Donate button on the website or contact the office for details. We are funded entirely by memberships, standing orders and donations and do not receive any government funding in order to remain independent in our campaigning.

## Newsline

Every Friday our email update on the week's stories from around the world goes out to many thousands of readers. If you would like to join them and keep up to date with secular issues, you can sign up on our website [www.secularism.org.uk/newsline.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/newsline.html)

## Volunteers

Our thanks to our volunteers who give us their time and talents so generously, particularly to:  
BRAD DAVIS of WhiteLight, designer of the *Bulletin* and Annual Report  
BARRY THORPE for research work  
CLAUDINE BAXTER and ALASTAIR BANTON for their work in the office and at events  
DENNIS PENALUNA, DOMINIC WIRDNAM and ALAN ROGERS for campaign work  
SVEN KLINGE and TREVOR ASTON for photographing our events  
JIM NUGENT for accounting and admin work.

## French trip

As mentioned in the last *Bulletin*, NSS members are invited on Sunday, 4 July to join the French organisation Libre Pensée to commemorate the death of the Chevalier de la Barre in Abbeville, northern France. There will be a commemorative lunch.

## Honorary Associates

We are pleased to welcome our new Honorary Associates:

**Sir Terry Pratchett** was awarded an OBE in 1998 and in the 2009 New Year's Honours List he was appointed a Knight Bachelor 'for services to literature'. He has written forty-nine books so far and co-written a further fifty. Sir Terry is a strong supporter of secularism and an active campaigner for the legalisation of assisted dying. He also campaigns for the Orang-Utan Foundation.



© David Bird

**Professor Colin Blakemore**



**Professor Colin Blakemore** is a neurobiologist at Oxford University specializing in vision and development of the brain. He was formerly chief executive of the British Medical Research Council and was President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

He has spoken out against the expansion of maintained religious schools and the teaching of creationism.

**Lord Goodhart QC** is a leading human rights lawyer. He was knighted in 1989 and was created a life peer as Baron Goodhart of Youlbury in 1997. In the House of Lords, he has been a spokesman for the Liberal Democrats in various capacities, usually relating to legal matters. He previously served as the Liberal Democrats' Shadow Lord Chancellor.



**Lord Goodhart QC**

Two long-standing NSS Honorary Associates have died this year:

**Michael Foot** (1913–2010) was a Labour Member of Parliament from 1945 to 1955 and from a by-election in 1960 until 1992. He was also the Leader of the Opposition from 1980 to 1983.

FitzRoy Somerset, **Lord Raglan** (1927–2010) was a hereditary peer who represented our interests in the House of Lords until the recent partial reform of the upper house.

Both were committed secularists and campaigners. We greatly valued their support and regret their loss.

## Secular Medical Forum

The SMF has met with the GMC, the doctors' regulatory body, outlining why non-therapeutic excision of the foreskin (NTEF), known euphemistically as ritual male circumcision, violates the GMC's own ethical framework. The GMC has yet to reply.

The SMF is working with the Royal College of Nursing in Wales to explore a more equitable and cost-effective chaplaincy service for Wales.

SMF co-ordinator, Dr Antony Lempert, won one of the 2010 Erotic Awards. This recognises the work the SMF is doing to secure sexual freedom and safety in the face of religious interference.

## New Secular Societies

**We welcome Nottingham Secular Society. If you would like to set up a group in your area, or a secular society at university or college, the office would be happy to give you any advice or support you may need.**

national  
**secular Bulletin**  
society

**Issue 45 Summer 2010**

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

Telephone: (020) 7404 3126  
Fax: 0870 762 8971

[www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)

**Executive Director**  
Keith Porteous Wood FCCA  
kpw@secularism.org.uk

**Senior Office Staff**  
Tessa Kendall and Stephen Evans  
admin@secularism.org.uk