

21ST CENTURY RE FOR ALL

We've launched a new campaign to ensure that every pupil growing up in Britain has the same entitlement to high quality, non-partisan education about religion and belief.

Almost thirty years after the introduction of a national curricular entitlement for all pupils, one subject remains exempt – religious education. The RE syllabus is still decided locally by committees of faith representatives, or worse, by religious bodies responsible for running faith schools.

Religious education is out of date and in need of reform. It's no longer helpful nor appropriate for teaching and learning in this area to be so heavily influenced by faith groups. Read all about our campaign to end the arbitrariness and unfairness of local determination inside.



End the RE postcode lottery www.ReformRE.org



Page 6: Yasmin Rehman named Secularist of the Year



Page 5: Success! Pharmacy Council protects patients from religious exceptions

SAT 9 SEPTEMBER

Manchester
Art Gallery



THE INAUGURAL BRADLAUGH LECTURE

DARE TO STAND ALONE

THE STORY OF CHARLES BRADLAUGH by BRYAN NIBLETT

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We need to defend both our lives and our way of life



At the time of writing Britain has been subject to three terrorist attacks in as many months. As always, there is much to commend about the nation's calm, defiant response.

The prospect of ISIS jihadis returning to Europe poses a level of threat not seen since the 1970s, but the threat of Islamist ideology lies not just in acts of terrorism, but in its broader theocratic worldview and its potential to spark division and sectarianism.

While the vast majority of Muslims will reject the jihadist interpretation of Islam, it is nevertheless an interpretation of Islam being espoused in modern Britain.

Pretending Islamist terrorism has "nothing to do with Islam" insults our intelligence. But we also need to counter the vile anti-Muslim bigotry that spikes after Islamist attacks and festers in the spaces abandoned by reasonable debate. If anti-Muslim bigotry or Islamist ideology harms British

Muslim integration, we all lose.

The threat we face is not just to our lives but to our way of life. The theocratic mindset that regards religion as the source from which all authority is derived is perhaps a greater threat to our liberal democracy than terrorism will ever be.

An ugly ideology that condones arbitrary violence, the subjugation of women and the supremacy of God's law over secular law is not compatible with the British way of life, and people of all faiths and none must unite in rejecting it.

But these views must be challenged, not censored. We must avoid knee-jerk "something must be done" responses that suppress free speech and civil liberties.

Whilst there is a relationship between extremist views and terrorism, they are two different things and policy makers need to be careful about confusing them.

Britain today is characterised by a diversity of creeds and cultures like never before. Countering

extremism must include a genuine commitment to tackling segregated communities.

Schools are the best chance we have to break down the barriers that can fuel prejudice, but this golden opportunity is being squandered by successive Governments' dogged attachment to faith-based education. Britain's youngsters must be educated together, not divided by religion and ethnicity. And whether it be found in the state, independent or burgeoning 'illegal' sector, religious indoctrination and exposure of children to extremist ideology in schools must be considered an abuse of children's rights.

The task before us is to engage governments and civil society in the struggle to build a more assertive culture that robustly, actively and unashamedly promotes democratic values such as the separation of religion and state, the rule of law, human rights and equal treatment. In that way, secularism can protect us all.

NSS launches '21st Century RE for all' campaign

Next year marks the 30th anniversary of the Education Reform Act 1988 which saw the introduction of a national curricular entitlement for all pupils. One subject alone remains set apart from this – religious education.

The religious education syllabus is still decided locally by committees of faith representatives, or worse, by religious bodies responsible for running faith schools. This 'local determination' exists as an anachronistic hangover which survives merely because of the privileged position of churches and other religious organisations.

The time has surely come for every pupil, regardless of where they live, or what school they attend, to have the same entitlement to high quality, non-partisan knowledge about religious and non-religious worldviews. Religious instruction and the in-depth teaching of specific faiths is for parents, for those that want it, and not the job of state schools. There is, however, value in young people understanding the significance

of religion and other worldviews in society, the huge religious diversity that exists, and the importance of faith to many people – albeit the majority in this country are now non-religious. There's also room to look at a broad spectrum of human ideas, ethics and philosophy. There are examples of great practice out there that could contribute to a reformed, revitalised subject fit for the 21st century.

Reform must separate the academic study of religion and belief issues from any confessional or instructional teaching. We're also campaigning to ensure that religion and belief education in all schools is inspected by Ofsted, and not left to religious bodies, and receives no less rigorous scrutiny than any other area of the curriculum. We've shared our proposals with the independent Commission on Religious Education, and are building a campaign which reaches teachers, parents and education experts across the political and philosophical spectrum. To get involved and stay up to date, visit reformRE.org.

NSS urges action over fundamentalist schools

The Department for Education responded positively to our calls for it to investigate faith schools implicated in ostracising children of transgender parents, as highlighted by a recent legal case.

A family court ruling in March highlighted the intolerant attitudes prevalent in some minority religious schools that have led to what the judge described as “clear examples of discrimination and victimisation”.

We urged schools minister Lord Nash to investigate the schools concerned and the broader issues raised, warning that unless school standards are

enforced, children in some schools will continue to be subjected to ideas that are counter-cohesive, separatist and contrary to the values widely shared in Britain.

Lord Nash assured us that the DfE was working with Ofsted to ensure that the schools concerned were inspected, paying particular attention to the standards we mentioned. He also assured us that the Government shared the NSS’s concerns about unregistered schools, saying they were “illegal, unsafe and are denying pupils a good education.”



Opposing faith school expansion in Wales

We’re pleased to report that plans for a new supersize faith school in Gwynedd, North Wales, were abandoned following successful campaigning from the NSS. The proposed Church of Wales ethos was strongly opposed by locals who wanted a community school, not a religious one. One



councillor said a “loss of trust between church and community” meant the council needed to rethink the plans.

However, despite vigorous campaigning, many non-religious parents and pupils in Powys will have no

option other than a faith school after the local council approved plans to replace four existing schools with

two ‘super-schools’ – one a Welsh language school, and the other a Church in Wales primary school – despite the number of churchgoers in Powys dropping from 15% of the population in 1982 to just 7% in 2012.

We raised objections with the Welsh Government, but our concerns were met with indifference. Even worse, the Welsh Government said it was unable to provide an assurance that all children would have access to a fully inclusive secular school.

Scrap Collective Worship law

In April we were pleased to support a petition launched by two Welsh students calling on Welsh Assembly Members to end the obligation on schools to hold collective worship. We also called on the Cabinet Secretary for Education in Wales, Kirsty Williams, to lead the way on child rights by repealing these provisions regarding collective worship which fail to uphold children’s human rights.

Ms Williams suggested a review of collective worship in Wales could be undertaken once the ongoing curriculum reform has been completed. We told the education minister that a truly progressive new curriculum for Wales would include a duty on all schools to ensure that all aspects of its curriculum, including assemblies, are respectful and inclusive of all pupils.



Rhiannon Shipton and Lily McAllister-Sutton

Plans for a new wave of 100% religiously selective schools

Despite widespread opposition, the Government still plans to allow new faith schools to religiously select 100% of their pupil intake. An opinion poll conducted by the Accord Coalition found that 80% of those surveyed – including two-thirds of Catholics – are opposed to removing the current cap, which limits schools to selecting no more than half of their pupils on religious grounds. Ahead of the general election we lobbied all main parties urging them to end religious discrimination and segregation in our schools. Prime Minister Theresa May’s plans to extend it are a deeply retrograde step.

Sex Education reform

Under pressure from the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child, at least four parliamentary committees, and members of the Sex Education Forum, including the NSS, the Government finally agreed to mandatory age appropriate provision of relationship and sex education (RSE) in all schools.

The proposals are a welcome step in the right direction, but the decision to give faith schools leeway to teach the subject in accordance with their religion means some children will be left behind. We fear that this will mean LGBT pupils will continue to be marginalised, and that faith schools will continue to be allowed to shield pupils from key knowledge and/or use the subject to promote their ideology.

The low status of RSE has led to it being a target of evangelising groups visiting schools. In May, we worked with the Isle of Man Freethinkers to challenge the Scripture Union delivering abstinence-focused RSE classes on the island.

ECJ says that employers can require staff to wear religiously neutral clothing

The European Court of Justice provoked controversy when it ruled that banning the wearing of religious symbols, including headscarves, might not necessarily constitute unlawful discrimination in certain circumstances.

Broadcasters were clearly having difficulty finding commentators taking a balanced and informed view. We challenged the overblown rhetoric of those describing this as an assault on Muslims, and our campaigns director Stephen Evans wrote for *Europe's World* that this ruling wouldn't amount to any real threat

to anybody wanting to wear religious clothing in the UK: a ban wouldn't be allowed if it could be shown to amount to indirect discrimination against any religious group. Executive director Keith Porteous Wood appeared on international TV channels including Deutsche Welle.

Both defended the right to expect religious and political neutrality of employees when it is done in pursuit of a legitimate aim, and pursued in a proportionate way.



Keith Porteous Wood on Sky News

NSS debunks phoney 'war on Easter'

We were on hand in April when the Prime Minister, Theresa May, visiting Saudi Arabia, joined the Church of England in claiming the National Trust was 'airbrushing' Easter out of their 'Cadbury egg hunt'. In reality, both the Cadburys and National Trust website used the word Easter many times. We spoke out on numerous media outlets to rebut the Church's 'fake news'.

But the Prime Minister can get half way around the world before the truth has time to put its shoes on, and speaking from Riyadh she said the decision not to mention Easter was "ridiculous".

Even if the matter had been genuinely reported, a prime minister, far less a devout Christian one, could have been expected to raise more pressing issues in the Middle East than Cadbury's branding, and more sinister organisations to deal with than the National Trust.



Keith Porteous Wood on BBC News



NSS calls for reform of Thought for the Day

We wrote to the *Today* programme's new editor, Sarah Sands, as soon as she was appointed, asking her to finally reform *Thought for the Day*. We again argued that the slot should be open to non-religious contributors, or moved out of a current affairs programme, where it is brazenly scheduled to reach a peak audience, into a more appropriate, niche slot. In June, the BBC allowed Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby to use the slot to promote the Church of England's latest evangelism campaign, which invites "more people to come to know Jesus Christ". Ms Sands has expressed support for opening the slot to non-religious voices, but the BBC hierarchy seems as determined as ever to block *Thought for the Day* from any reform.



Success: Pharmacists must put patient care ahead of religious beliefs

Our Secular Medical Forum has achieved a major success, after the body which regulates pharmacists accepted their recommendations to put patients' needs above the religious beliefs of pharmacists.

We raised our concerns when the General Pharmaceutical Council launched a consultation which called for 'balance' between religion and a patients' needs.

The Secular Medical Forum's submission persuaded the regulators

to launch a new consultation, to which we responded, and the GPhC accepted our recommendations, in a major advance for patients' rights.

This means that pharmacists will not be able to refer patients to a different provider just because an individual pharmacy worker has a religious or philosophical objection to their



request for medication such as emergency contraception.

The details of the changes, which have been vigorously opposed by religious groups, are yet to be finalised.

Dr Antony Lempert, the coordinator of the Secular Medical Forum said that the changes would protect patients from the "small cohort of very religious pharmacists who wish to impose their own views on patients".

NSS urges regulator to investigate charity behind monk-brewed 'tonic wine'



We have asked the Charity Commission to investigate whether the religious charity behind the sale of Buckfast Tonic Wine should have its charitable status revoked.

Buckfast Abbey Trust made £8.8m profit in the past year, but does not pay tax on its profits from

the wine because the trust is a charity. To benefit from charitable status, charities must exist for a purpose which is beneficial to the community, in this case "for the advancement of the Catholic faith".

The Charity Commission is now investigating our complaint.

Errors in Government funding of the Church

In response to our enquiries the National Audit Office identified "a number of areas for improvement in the governance, operation and oversight" of a fund used by the Government to fund cathedral repairs.

Our objection is not to the state maintaining the country's architectural heritage, provided such maintenance is necessary and justified, but because the test of the Church's financial need is assessed "less strictly" than other factors used to award grants. In other words, the Church has not had to rigorously demonstrate its financial need before being awarded large sums of taxpayers' money.

As a result of our work, the NAO have reported their concerns to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.



Remembering David Tribe

We were saddened to learn of the death of David Tribe, who served as president of the society from 1963 to 1971. David died in Australia at the age of 86.

He wrote a number of books and pamphlets, including a biography of Charles Bradlaugh (President Charles Bradlaugh MP, 1971) and a history of the NSS (100 Years of Freethought, 1967).

David was a formidable speaker and debater, and fondly remembered by those who knew him and for his extremely effective contribution to the Society.

Secularist of the Year

Yasmin Rehman was awarded our Secularist of the Year prize for 2017. Our thanks again to Dr Michael Irwin who sponsored the £5,000 award.

Yasmin has spent much of the past two years working to get the Government to recognise the dangers faced by ex-Muslims and Ahmadi Muslims from Islamic extremists. She has even used her own home as a shelter for women at risk of domestic abuse.

She gave a powerful and moving speech on the many facets of Islamic fundamentalism that curtail and limit the lives of Muslims here in Britain, fracturing wider society. President Terry Sanderson applauded her work and courage.

The other nominees shortlisted for the prize were Dr Steven Kettell for his work on a secular response to the Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life, Houzan Mahmoud of the Kurdish Culture Project, integration and social cohesion expert Prof Ted Cantle, former UN Special Rapporteur Ms Asma Jahangir and Scott Moore, founder of the Let Pupils Choose award.



Gita Sahgal (left) with winner Yasmin Rehman



NSS President Terry Sanderson



Left to right: Scott Moore, Maryam Namazie, Yasmin Rehman, Barry Duke, and NSS Campaigns Director Stephen Evans

“I’ve tried to raise these issues and I’ve been shut down, whether I’ve done it through an organisation or through my own work. I’ve been working on anti-racism issues and feminism for 32 years now and there seems to be a movement that silences us by this use of ‘Islamophobia’. I’m not saying there’s no anti-Muslim sentiment – there absolutely is but to silence any dissent, any challenges with that allegation, and then to follow it up with the label of apostasy is deeply dangerous in the community I come from because it carries the death sentence.”

— **Yasmin Rehman**

“Her commitment to advancing the rights of women is unquestionable and she has used her own home as a shelter for women who were under threat of murder and sexual violence. She recognises that a secular position in legal and policy areas is the only one that will protect women in these situations.”

— **Terry Sanderson**

“The struggle for secularism and against religious totalitarianism is not just about politics, but about the lived experience of real people. Totalitarians often fear the arts for their ability to open the first breathing space where their ideas can be challenged.”

— **Terry Sanderson**

End caste discrimination: your help needed urgently

The promised Government consultation on the outlawing of caste discrimination has finally been launched, but it disingenuously encourages respondents to await the development of case law, which we are convinced will never happen. Cases brought using existing law are likely to be more problematical and costly than they would be if caste discrimination were specifically proscribed in the Equality Act, the solution we favour.

We alerted Honorary Associate (and then MP) Graham Allen who wrote to the minister in charge of the consultation, the Rt. Hon Justine Greening, complaining that “in my thirty years in Parliament I cannot recall [a consultation] that is so misleading and biased”. Council member Josephine Macintosh predicted such bias in September, in a speech to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The NSS has worked closely with other NGOs working for effective legal protection and together they have launched a website to aid supporters to fill in the consultation.

Visit www.casteintheuk.org to find out more. The consultation closes 18 July 2017.

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 1)

Speaking out against blasphemy laws

There has been another flurry of Islamist campaigns targeting ‘blasphemers’ and ‘apostates’ across

Mashal Khan Professor Tahira
alik Ashfaq Ahmed Malik Salee
Latif H. Farook Xulhas Mannan
Tajoy Mjumdar Asad Shah Faisal
efin Dipa Malleshappa M Kalbur
iloy Chaterjee Ananta Bijoy Das
Washiqur Rahman Farkhunda
Dr Avjit Roy Govind Pansare
Shafiul Islam Tufayl Naqvi
Shehzad Masih Shama Masih
ashid Rehman Ahmed Rajib Haide
arendra Dabholkar Afrasheem Al

the world. These campaigns have included the hounding and mass reporting of atheist groups on social media to get them shut down, and the mob killing of bloggers.

Political debate and news is more concerned with blasphemy now than ever before.

It’s almost impossible to keep track of the many killings targeting blasphemers. We don’t want these people, or their courage, to be forgotten. That’s why we published an article listing all of their names and how they died. The article just includes those killed in the 21st century, but we fear it may be impossible to ever compile a truly

complete list.

We’ve seen social media campaigns and mobs call for blasphemers to face death, and the conviction of politicians in supposedly ‘moderate’ Islamic countries for ‘blasphemy’. Several western governments are facing calls to repeal their own blasphemy laws, especially after the ludicrous decision of Irish police to briefly investigate Stephen Fry for making blasphemous comments on TV. We’re pleased to lend our support to these petitions and campaigns, as blasphemy laws in the west, even if they are never used, undermine free speech.

Other campaigning

■ In March the BBC Asian Network asked, “What is the right punishment for blasphemy?” There was uproar in response, and we were quoted in the Independent on the appalling question. The channel apologised and said it was a “Provocative question that got it wrong.”

■ The Society wrote to Home Secretary Amber Rudd to raise concerns about a very popular Islamic website which advocates violence and intolerance. Our letter was passed by the Home Office to the Office for Counter Extremism.

■ The Government has announced plans for a Commission for Countering Extremism, and we will continue to ensure that counter-extremism measures are proportionate and do not unduly restrict legitimate free speech.

■ In April we commended the Foreign Office on its work urging Russia to uphold human rights after the

Russian Supreme Court labelled Jehovah’s Witnesses ‘extremists’.

■ The NSS helped draft an international letter calling for mandatory reporting of child abuse after an Australian Catholic bishop admitted the “devastating” scale of clerical child abuse there.

■ In March we spoke at a Faith and Law event to debate the role of faith schools. Rabbi Meyer, the executive director of Partnerships for Jewish Schools defended religiously segregated education, while our campaigns director, Stephen Evans, made the case for inclusive secular schooling for all.

■ NSS Council member Sadikur Rahman gave a talk on sharia ‘law’ to East London Humanists, while Council member Chris Moos and President Terry Sanderson spoke at a ‘Defending Progressivism’ conference, organised by Conatus News and the Kurdish Culture Project.



THE INAUGURAL BRADLAUGH LECTURE: 'Dare to stand alone: The Story of Charles Bradlaugh'

MANCHESTER ART GALLERY, MOSLEY STREET, MANCHESTER, M2 3JL

Saturday 9 September 2017, 2pm – 5pm

Join us for the inaugural Bradlaugh Lecture and reception at Manchester Art Gallery – an event that will mark the end of our 150th anniversary celebrations.

Bryan Niblett, author of the definitive biography of NSS founding president, Charles Bradlaugh, will present a lecture based on his highly acclaimed book *Dare to Stand Alone*.

The event will also coincide with the re-hanging of Walter Sickert's immense portrait of Bradlaugh standing at the

Bar of the House of Commons, which attendees will be able to view for the first time in decades. The portrait was gifted to the gallery by the NSS's Manchester branch in 1911.

Guests will also hear a 'very brief history of the NSS' from NSS historian Bob Forder.

The lecture will be followed by a drinks reception.

NSS Members: Free, Non-members £5. Tickets available via the website or by calling the office on 020 7404 3126.

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Dene Smart for his work on education research and evidence.

Adele Walker for her research into evangelism in schools.

To find out more about volunteering please visit secularism.org.uk/get-involved.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 22 – Sunday 23 July 2017

International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression in the 21st Century CENTRAL LONDON

Saturday 25 November 2017

NSS Annual General Meeting

Our Council warmly invites all members to attend and meet them and other members at the reception that follows the AGM.

CENTRAL LONDON, MEMBERS ONLY

To find more events and to let us know about an event please visit secularism.org.uk/events We particularly encourage people to get in touch with events outside of London.

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International Conference on Freedom of
Conscience and Expression
Celebrating Blasphemy and Apostasy

22-24th July, Central London

www.secularconference.com

