



WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

A Secularist Response to the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life

NOVEMBER 2016

INTRODUCTION*

The last few decades have seen significant changes to the landscape of religion and belief in Britain. On-going processes of secularisation, increasing cultural pluralism and the development of a more diverse and complex society have undermined the traditional claim that Britain is a Christian country. According to British Social Attitude surveys the proportion of the adult population describing themselves as 'Christian' fell from 67% to 41.7% from 1983-2014. The proportion belonging to non-Christian faiths grew from 2% to 7.7% during the same period, while the proportion self-identifying as having 'no religion' rose from 31% to 48.9%. With this growth in the non-religious being significantly more pronounced among younger age groups, the trend of religious decline is one that shows no sign of abating.¹

These developments pose a number of important challenges. Concerns about social cohesion, debates around national identity and questions about balancing the rights and duties of citizenship have been thrust to the forefront of British public life. In 2013 the Woolf Institute, a Cambridge-based non-government organisation devoted to the academic study of relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims, established a Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life

* This document is based on the deliberations of an expert panel convened at the University of Warwick on 8 March 2016. The members of the panel were: Dr Steven Kettell (University of Warwick); Professor David Voas (University College London); Dr Siobhan McAndrew (University of Bristol); David Pollock (former President of the European Humanist Federation); Dr Robert Morris; Tehmina Kazi (then-Director, British Muslims for Secular Democracy); Andrew Copson (Chief Executive, British Humanist Association); and Keith Porteous-Wood (Executive Director, National Secular Society). This workshop was funded by Institute of Advanced Study (University of Warwick) Public Engagement Award: IAS/23004/15. Hard copies of this document were printed with support from ESRC/University of Warwick IAA grant: ES/M500434/1. The views contained in this response do not reflect the views of the University of Warwick. A full list of signatories can be found in the Appendix.

(CORAB) to examine some of these issues. Chaired by a former Lord Justice, Baroness Butler-Sloss, the expressed purpose of the Commission was to consider the role of religion and belief in contemporary Britain, to examine ways of developing an inclusive sense of national identity and the common good, and to make recommendations for public life and policy.² In December 2015 the Commission published its findings in a report entitled 'Living With Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good'. The report made a total of 37 recommendations, divided into 6 categories ('vision', 'education', 'media', 'dialogue', 'action' and 'law'), and was described by Baroness Butler-Sloss as marking a 'new settlement' on the place of religion in public life.

A notable feature of the CORAB report was that it paid limited attention to secular views and voices.³ Secular opinions were inadequately represented by the composition of CORAB itself (of the twenty members of the Commission, just one - Andrew Copson, the chief executive of the British Humanist Association - was from a 'non-religious' organisation), as well as by the evidence that was taken by the Commission during its term of operation. Despite an extensive two-year consultation process, many non-religious individuals and organisations (including the National Secular Society) did not submit any evidence to the Commission due to concerns about the unrepresentative character of its membership as well as its philosophical orientation. Secular voices were also given insufficient weight in the recommendations of the final report. Despite acknowledging the decline of religion, along with the rise of non-religion and the growing diversity of religion and belief in Britain, CORAB sought to promote an enhanced and more prominent role for faith in British public life.

This response, which is supported by secularists from a range of spheres, including academics, activists and representatives from Britain's leading campaign

groups, aims to provide a critical counterweight to the CORAB recommendations. We believe that the Commission's attempt to put religion at the very centre of British public life offers a one-dimensional, diminished and limited view of modern British society. Instead we emphasise an alternative, inclusive and positive secularist framework based on shared values to put an end to unjustified religious privilege and to ensure that the rights and freedoms of all citizens are afforded equal weight and protection.

This response is needed to ensure that the secular viewpoint can be heard and understood in the on-going and vital public debate on the role of religion in British public life.

1. 'VISION'

The flaws in the CORAB report are evident from the outset. In setting out its vision for the role of religion and belief in British society, the Commission recommends that:

- 'A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying public life. It would take place at all levels and in all regions. The outcome might well be ... a statement of the principles and values which foster the common good, and should underpin and guide public life' (recommendation 1: 'Shared values').⁴
- 'There is a widespread need for greater religion and belief literacy. Relevant educational and professional bodies should draw up syllabuses, courses, programmes and modules' (recommendation 2: 'Religion and belief literacy').

In our view the first of these recommendations, with its call for a national conversation involving 'leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions', is deeply problematic, not least because it presents a notion of communal representation that is completely at odds with British traditions and values. The report assigns a quasi-feudal role to religious leaders, who are taken to speak on behalf of entire groups of people, at a time when the majority of the British population belongs to no religion and when the majority of those who do belong to a religion pay little attention to directives from religious authorities. Individuals have rights and responsibilities, and the effort to define these principles is at heart a secular common project.

The emphasis on 'ethical traditions' is equally problematic. The term itself is never explained, and it is difficult to see how it could be interpreted in a way that might be fully and properly inclusive of the non-religious population (the majority of whom acknowledge no explicit affiliation to any 'ethical tradition').

The second recommendation highlights a more general problem with the CORAB report; namely, its emphasis on the need for greater 'religion and belief literacy'. We believe that the persistent emphasis on this phrase (which appears in the report no fewer than 19 times) reflects the inherent bias of the Commission and the underlying interests of its commissioners, rather than those of British society as a whole. It is notable that CORAB provides no evidence to support its assertions on this issue, and precisely why religion and belief literacy deserves to be given such priority (especially given the continuing decline of religion in British society) is a question that remains unanswered.

The report focuses next on the composition of the House of Lords. At the present time there are 26 Church of England Bishops (known as 'Lords Spiritual') with the automatic right to sit in Britain's Parliament, giving them a significant platform within the legislative process. Britain is the only sovereign democratic country to have automatic religious representation in its legislature. Yet CORAB calls not for the removal of this anomaly but for the representation of religion in the House of Lords to be reformed in order to give voice to a greater variety of religious voices.

- 'The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national forums such as the House of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions, and of Christian denominations other than the Church of England' (recommendation 3: 'House of Lords').

We are strongly opposed to any religion or belief organisation having an automatic right to have representatives in Parliament. In our view this practice is wholly anachronistic, has no place in a modern democratic society and should be abolished as soon as possible. It is a matter of principle that there should be no form of communal or corporate representation in the legislature, whether of religious interests or any other. Once again it is notable that CORAB offers no justification for prioritising religious interests in this way, and fails to engage with any of the opposing arguments. While the report does not discuss public support for Bishops in the House of Lords, a 2012 poll conducted by YouGov (cited in footnote 17) found that 58% of Britons were of the view that this practice should not continue.⁵

The issue of Bishops in the House of Lords raises a wider and more fundamental point (also overlooked by CORAB), namely the legitimacy of an established Church. Britain is one of the few democratic states in the world that continues to promote an official religion (in the form of the Church of England), and the fact that most of its citizens do not actually subscribe to it only compounds the iniquity of continuing with this form of religious privilege.

The report then moves on to discuss the issue of ceremonies. It recommends that:

- 'All those responsible for national and civic events, whether in the public sphere or in church, including the Coronation, should ensure that the pluralist character of modern society is reflected' (recommendation 4: 'Ceremonies').

The issue of pluralism raises a significant and important point. We fail to see how the coronation of the monarch, which is a specifically Anglican ceremony, can be inclusive in more than a token sense unless it ceases to be a religious ritual. The coronation also departs from the largely symbolic role performed by the sovereign in the British constitution by affirming their authority and duty in religious terms. While this is alienating for the growing non-Christian majority, CORAB does not even refer to the issue, and nor does it highlight the potential alternatives to a religious ceremony (such as holding the coronation or investiture in an inclusive secular ceremony at Westminster Hall).

We are also concerned that use of religious representatives in national and civic events gives unwarranted credence to their self-presentation as moral leaders representing separate communities. We call for national and civic events to be constituted on secular lines, in which all members of British society can be fully, equally and inclusively represented as citizens without regard to their specific religion or belief. There are many worthy secular bodies that could take a role in such events.

This section of the CORAB report concludes with a recommendation on the issue of chaplaincy.

- 'Funding for chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons and higher education should be protected with equitable representation for those from non-Christian religious traditions and for those from humanist traditions' (recommendation 5: 'Chaplaincy').

This recommendation is problematic in several respects. First of all it does not specify what the term 'funding' means in this context, and whether this is taken to

mean public or private or mixed sources of finance. Similarly it is far from clear who or what this funding needs to be 'protected' from, and why. In the absence of any answers to these questions it is difficult to know what the Commission is actually trying to recommend (oddly, the recommendation makes no mention of the role of chaplaincy in the armed forces, which is a significant role in the current provision of support).

This issue also raises important questions about need. At the present time the vast majority of pastoral care in Britain is provided by the Church of England. According to the British Humanist Association this amounts to 93% of all chaplains, leaving just 7% available for members of other Christian denominations, other faiths and the non-religious. This imbalance highlights critical issues of employment discrimination as well as the appropriate use of public funds, with millions of pounds a year being spent on religious chaplaincy in the NHS as well as the prisons, armed forces and higher education. We do not believe that any pastoral care posts should continue to be ring-fenced for people of certain religious beliefs. Such discrimination is unacceptable for publicly funded posts, and any representation based explicitly on religion or belief should be funded by charitable trusts or by the organisations they represent.

2. 'EDUCATION'

The next section of the CORAB report addresses the subject of education. The principal recommendations here deal with the teaching of religion and belief and the role of compulsory worship. The Commission maintains that:

- 'Governments across the UK should introduce a statutory entitlement for all schools within the state system for a subject dealing with religious and non-religious worldviews ... The content should be broad and inclusive in a way that reflects the diversity of religion and belief in the UK' (recommendation 6: 'Statutory entitlement').
- 'Governments should repeal requirements for schools to hold acts of collective worship or religious observance and issue new guidelines building on current best practice for inclusive assemblies and times for reflection that draw upon a range of sources' (recommendation 7: 'Compulsory worship').
- 'In all teacher education attention should be given to religion and belief that is of a similar level to that which is given to reading and maths' (recommendation 11: 'Training').
- 'Governments should clarify and emphasise that in all phases and sectors of the education system respectful and thoughtful discussion of contrasting opinions and worldviews is essential, and that all staff have skills in the educative handling of sensitive and controversial issues' (recommendation, 12: 'Dialogue and enquiry').

We are broadly supportive of these recommendations, but there are a number of important qualifications that need to be made. The first of these is that the Commission is far from clear on the status that it thinks the teaching of religion and belief should have. There is a notable contradiction, for instance, between recommendation 6, which goes on to call for the teaching of religion and belief to have the same status as 'other humanities subjects', and recommendation 11, which calls for the subject to be granted the same status as 'reading and maths'.

Putting this confusion aside, our second and more substantial objection concerns the undue prominence that is given to the teaching of religion and belief. In our view the importance attached to this subject is not justified by religion's declining social and cultural standing. There is no reason (and there is certainly no reasoning given in the report) why religion should be accorded the same status as core subjects such as reading and maths, or why it should be privileged over science, technology, foreign languages, ethics, the arts, and other important subjects.

CORAB then turns to the issue of faith schools. On this it recommends that:

- 'Responsible bodies should recognise the negative practical consequences of selection by religion in schools, and that most religious schools can further their aims without selecting on grounds of religion in their admissions and employment practices, and should take measures to reduce such selection' (recommendation 8: 'Admissions and employment').

We agree with CORAB on the negative consequences of selection by faith schools, but in our view the Commission does not go anywhere near far enough. Again, it is notable that CORAB fails to engage with the central themes of the

debate (in this case the question of why religious schools should have any place in the state sector, and at taxpayers' expense). Similarly, it does not provide any empirical evidence in defence of faith schools themselves. The number of pupils being educated in Church of England schools, which account for around a quarter of all schools, hugely exceeds the proportion of the adult population that attends Anglican churches on any given Sunday (around 2-3%), and since the turn of the century the role of the Church in the education system has started to grow rapidly.

We believe that there should be a complete end to all faith schools. They have a negative impact on social cohesion, foster the segregation of children on social, ethnic and religious lines and are antithetical to choice and equality. Non-religious parents are often forced to send their child to a faith school due to a lack of secular alternatives and the current legal situation is discriminatory for staff as well as children, enabling faith schools to employ and promote teachers (and in England even non-teaching staff) according to their own religious preferences. With current levels of support for maintaining faith schools set to unwind as the secularisation of British society increases and as the intake of faith schools themselves becomes increasingly secular, this situation is likely to become increasingly untenable.

For these reasons, there is a clear need for the political settlement providing state support for faith schools to be rethought and re-engineered. Such moves will require careful planning. In our view the government should draw up a roadmap towards achieving this end consisting of an immediate ban on the use of selection on religious grounds when pupils are chosen for admission and staff for employment (with the possible exception of posts devoted wholly or mainly to religious education in faith schools).

CORAB concludes its recommendations on education by discussing the use of school premises outside of the designated school day, and the role of inspectorates. Here it is recommended that:

- 'Governments should expect publicly funded schools to be open for the provision of religion or belief-specific teaching and worship on the school premises outside of the timetable for those who request it and wish to participate' (recommendation 9: 'Outside the timetable').
- 'State inspectorates should be concerned with every aspect of the life of faith schools, including religious elements currently inspected by denominational authorities' (recommendation 10: 'Inspection').

Although we have no objection to the first of these recommendations, we would insist that religion or belief bodies had no privileged access to school premises over other organisations, and that such religion or belief teaching did not constitute the whole of any 'extended day' provision. We are concerned that this recommendation could potentially be used as a means of promoting worship using school premises (and with the apparent authority of the school), and believe that appropriate regulatory and monitoring processes should be put in place to prevent this from happening.

We agree strongly with recommendation 10 on the inspection of school life.

3. 'MEDIA'

The CORAB report then turns to issues relating to the media. The key recommendations contained in this section are that:

- 'Serious and ongoing attempts should be made to increase religion and belief literacy among all journalists and reporters' (recommendation 14: 'Religion and belief').
- Consideration should be given 'to establishing a panel of experts on religion and belief for the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) to use when there are complaints about the media', along with 'an annual index of religion and belief literacy which would identify media outlets with best practice' (recommendation 15: 'Advisory panel').
- The coverage of religion should 'continue to be mandated in the BBC 2016 charter', which should make reference 'to the exploration of ethical dilemmas and the need for the public to come together at times of national grief or celebration' (recommendation 18: 'BBC').
- Slots on Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day' programme should be 'extended to include contributions from those who will speak from a non-religious perspective, including humanists' (recommendation 19: 'Thought for the day').
- 'Major commercial channels and stations should examine their policies on the coverage of religious topics to ensure that the place of religion

and belief in society is adequately represented' (recommendation 20: 'Commercial channels and stations').

In our view these recommendations - which consist, in the main, of exhortations to third parties (such as journalists, the IPSO or commercial media outlets) - are disproportionate, regressive and ultimately useless. Yet again they reflect an inordinate concern for religion and belief literacy, and are designed with the clear effect of sustaining religious privilege. In what is now a running theme, the report offers no evidence to support its assertion that religious illiteracy is a problem of any significant importance, let alone one so serious as to require interventionist measures. We would expect that there to be widespread agreement that, as a matter of principle, any attempt to dictate the way in which religion is reported by the press is a dangerous idea that ought to be resisted.

We also believe that the religious output of the BBC, as Britain's foremost publicly funded media organisation, is disproportionate and out-of-sync with the religious composition of Britain. The vast majority of the BBC's religious output is of a Christian nature, and its output is wholly non-reflective of the religious and non-religious makeup and life stances of the country (the stark lack of coverage given to religion by the major commercial channels is a clear demonstration of how little demand for it there is, as is the consistent survey evidence placing religious broadcasting among the least appreciated types of programme). For these reasons we believe that Radio 4's anachronistic and discriminatory 'Thought for the Day' slot should be dropped, that there should be no guidelines relating to minimum hours for religious broadcasts, and that nothing to this effect ought to be included in the BBC charter (which, contrary to the assumptions in the CORAB report, makes no reference to religion at all) or other governing instruments.

4. 'DIALOGUE'

The CORAB report continues by addressing the theme of dialogue. Here, the relevant recommendations centre on the promotion (and unsurprisingly the funding) of interfaith activities. The key points in this respect include that:

- 'It should be a high priority, not only for interfaith organisations but also for all religion and belief groups, educational institutions, public bodies and voluntary organisations, to promote opportunities for encounter and dialogue' (recommendation 21: 'Encounter and dialogue').
- 'Leaders of religion and belief groups should, with appropriate training, have good knowledge of the different traditions and communities within the UK, and should encourage their members to participate in dialogue and to help develop and maintain good relations within society' (recommendation 22: 'Leadership training').
- 'Government funding for interreligious dialogue should continue and the criteria for government grants should ensure that they serve to underpin the aspirations of the recipient bodies themselves' (recommendation 26: 'Role of government').

The recommendations in this section are directed mainly towards faith-based organisations rather than the public sphere, and are in that sense relatively benign. Nevertheless, we would again highlight the Commission's failure to quote evidence in support of the effectiveness of interfaith activities. We have strong objections, however, to the use of public funding for such projects. In our view the provision of public funds should be permitted only in exceptional circumstances

and/or where there is a clear, specific and immediate social purpose. The idea that public funds should 'serve to underpin the aspirations of the recipient bodies themselves' is entirely unacceptable: public funding should serve public ends.

5. 'ACTION'

The next section of the CORAB report engages with the theme of 'action'. In similar fashion to the previous section, most of the recommendations here are directed towards private, rather than public organisations. Some of the key recommendations are that:

- 'Organisations rooted in a particular religion or belief should become more proactive in identifying areas of social need where they can engage in common action across deep difference, and funding bodies should encourage social action which achieves this goal wherever it is possible' (recommendation 28: 'Proactive planning').
- 'Charitable trusts and CSR (corporate social responsibility) bodies should work with faith-based charities positioned to address particular social issues. If a religion or belief-based organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, then it should not be disadvantaged in applying for funding to do so, assuming its services are not exclusive or aimed at seeking converts' (recommendation. 32: 'Fair funding').

We agree with CORAB on the issue of proselytising by charities (recommendation 32), but have serious objections to the implications in respect of 'fair funding'. It is our view that government funds should not be used, even indirectly, to promote religious causes or viewpoints. Where religious organisations bid for public funds, the allocative criteria should include the satisfaction in open competition of publicly declared objective requirements where the outcomes are publicly and accessibly recorded.

This is not to suggest that faith-based charities do not perform good works (many of course do, and some on a large scale), but the public benefit criterion from the work of such bodies is often assumed rather than demonstrated and there is no clear evidence to suggest that people of faith are any more charitable than the non-religious. Given that many religious organisations harbour divisive and reactionary social attitudes (as demonstrated by their stance on fundamental equalities issues such as women and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, and steps to legalise assisted dying), the provision of government funding risks giving state support for moral positions that are at odds with public opinion.

On this basis we also note, with regret, that there is no call from CORAB for any reform or repeal of existing exemptions from equalities legislation allowing discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the areas not only of school admissions and employment (as mentioned above), but also of the provision of public services by religious bodies, even when under contract to a public authority. We believe that the law should be amended to ban discrimination by religious bodies in such circumstances.

6. 'LAW'

The final theme examined by the Commission concerns the treatment of religion and belief in law. The key recommendations here are that:

- 'An appropriate body ... should consider publishing guidance to encourage dialogue, mediation and dispute resolution where the manifestation of religion or belief in public life impacts or conflicts with the freedoms and rights of others' (recommendation 33: 'The balancing of rights').
- 'Further academic research is required to identify which communities, other than Christians, Jews and Muslims, have religion-based law or tribunals' (recommendation 34: 'Minority religious tribunals and courts').
- 'An appropriate body ... should review how the categories of race, ethnicity and religion interact in practice and whether there are certain unjust anomalies which must be recognised and addressed so that the law is more relevant, meaningful and fair in the light of more recent experience' (recommendation 36: 'The concept of ethnicity').

We have serious apprehensions about some of the issues that are raised in this section, and believe that more research is necessary in order that public policies can be placed on a firmer evidence-based footing. Many statutory religious exemptions and privileges (also sometimes described as accommodations and conscience provisions) unacceptably disadvantage the non-religious and those of other faiths. Some are even potentially in breach of the UK's obligations in international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights. There is a

compelling case for a comprehensive and robust survey of the law in respect of religion and belief.

We are also concerned that extending further legal protections to religious groups could lead to a curtailing of freedoms and an erosion of current safeguards (such as the freedom of expression safeguards contained in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act), leading to a risk of serious infringements of freedom of speech and expression. In our view, any moves in this area must be founded on sound secular reasons as opposed to religious sensitivities, and need to be approached with great caution. There is no right not to be insulted.

The issue of separate systems of religious courts and tribunals also presents a number of concerns. References to 'religion-based law' are extremely misleading (such rules do not have any force of law at all), and harbour a worrying potential for the abuse of vulnerable citizens, especially women, children and sexual minorities. While mindful that attending a religious tribunal is normally a matter of personal choice, we believe that their use must be accompanied by a number of strict conditions. For example, all participants should be fully informed in advance about their rights in civil law, the active consent of all participants should be freely and manifestly obtained, the processes involved should be monitored in an appropriate way, and these bodies should refrain from pretending to a legal status that they do not possess. To this end we also believe that there is a significant need for focussed public education programmes on the nature of the law in order that citizens who are likely to be using religious tribunals are made fully aware of their human and civil rights.⁶

A SECULARIST VISION

Significant changes to the landscape of religion and belief have raised a number of critical issues. One of the foremost amongst these is the role of religion in public life. In its recommendations the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life has promoted, without substantial arguments, a defence of religion's importance and religious privilege that is at odds with the realities of modern British society.

The CORAB report provides little evidence to support its core assertions, and it offers no reasoned justification for the position that it takes. Despite token recognition of religious decline the Commission fails to acknowledge that the landscape of religion and belief in Britain has changed out of all recognition in the last fifty years. The result is that, instead of trying to develop solutions that take account of this fact, the Commission has called for even greater religious influence and privilege. Given this, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the recommendations made by CORAB owe more to the underlying interests of its members than to a serious concern with issues of public life and policy.

In setting out our response, however, we are aware of the need to do more than voice our opposition. To move beyond criticism it is necessary to set out a positive secularist vision for the future of British society.

The foundational principle of secularism is the separation of 'church and state'. This holds that the role of the state is to maintain a position of formal neutrality, keeping an equal, impartial and dispassionate distance from all systems of religion and belief. While secularism is often presented as involving a curtailment of religious freedom, as an authoritarian attempt to force religion out of public life

and to impose a particular (usually non-religious) worldview, the reality is that a secular state (as opposed to an atheist or theocratic state) offers an extension of freedoms to believers and non-believers alike.

A secular state grants religion no special privileges, but nor does it impose upon it any special restrictions. Secularism protects the affairs of state from religious interference, ensuring that citizens are free from religious discrimination or religious demands other than those that are voluntarily accepted. At the same time it protects religion from the state, ensuring that religious organisations (just like any other type of voluntary association) are free to act and behave however they choose so long as such activities remain within the law. In this way, by distancing itself from all systems of religion or belief, a secular state provides the most effective framework for guaranteeing equality for all citizens, and offers the best means of fostering a free, inclusive and democratic society in which people of all faiths and none can live harmoniously together.

These issues are all the more important given the challenges facing Britain in the twenty-first century. Those espousing the interests of a shrinking religious population continue to wield disproportionate influence over non-religious citizens, whose voices are often drowned out by virtue of their heterogeneity and historical lack of representatives at the tables of power. But with a growing proportion of Britain's population now identifying as non-religious, and with levels of cultural pluralism and diversity on the rise, the need for a political and legal system capable of reflecting this changing social composition and of giving equal weight and recognition to all citizens, irrespective of their religious or philosophical beliefs, has never been greater.

Fostering social cohesion and promoting a sense of collective identity in which all citizens can have a stake requires that our common public discourse be based on shared beliefs and values and not founded in religious identities that are often a source of social tension. The recommendations of the CORAB report, which defends and promotes the expansion of unjustified religious privilege, are a recipe for increasing unfairness and division. Our response highlights the critical need for secular voices to be heard.

APPENDIX: LIST OF SIGNATORIES

The National Secular Society
The British Humanist Association
Professor Peter Atkins
The Lord Cashman CBE
Jim Fitzpatrick MP
Mr Michael Frayn
Graham Allen MP
The Rt Hon. the Lord Garel-Jones
The Lord Harrison of Chester
Professor Ted Honderich
Professor Susan Blackmore
Ms Virginia Ironside
Dr Michael Irwin
Professor Christopher French
Professor Simon Blackburn
Professor Steve Jones
The Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead
The Baroness Massey of Darwen
Maajid Nawaz
Ms Gita Sahgal
Mr Peter Tatchell
Yasmin Alibhai-Brown
Professor Kate Pickett
The Lord Taverne of Pimlico

¹ British Social Attitude reports are available from: <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/>

² For full details of the Commission and its report, see: <http://www.corab.org.uk/>

³ The term 'secularism' can be interpreted in a number of different ways. We use it here to refer to the separation of church and state, and to the equal treatment of all citizens regardless of their religion or belief. From this perspective the term 'secular' is not to be equated to atheism, agnosticism or other non-religious worldviews, but simply refers to aspects of social and political life that are not connected to religion or belief. Accordingly, we take the term 'secularist' to mean somebody who is supportive of secularism as a guiding principle for government and society.

⁴ The numbering and the ordering of the recommendations are taken from the checklist in Chapter 9 of the CORAB report. The recommendations are not always cited in full and some points have been omitted, especially when recommendations are similar and when our likely response can be inferred from what is written elsewhere in this response.

⁵ A public consultation carried out by the Lord Chancellor in 2003 found that the great majority (71%) of those who expressed a view were against seats for Bishops in the Lords (56% wanted no bishops, and 15% wanted them only as individual appointments through the appointments procedure). If those who did not specifically mention bishops but did want a wholly elected House were included, then 90% of respondents were against bishops having any seats as of right.

⁶ We note that the majority of such tribunals' business relates to religious marriages that have broken down, and that if religious marriages were conducted in such a way that they were always civil marriages much of the resort to tribunals might be diverted to the divorce courts.

