

**PUBLIC MEETING  
Richmond upon Thames  
12 August 2010**

**Summary of speaker's comments**

**Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society:**

Terry focused on the Protest the Pope campaign itself.

He emphasised that the criticisms were of *this Pope* and not of catholics in general, many of whom expressed support for some of the issues raised. He characterised some of the Pope's teachings as inhumane, cruel and backward and pointed out that the catholic congregation was falling in number, perhaps as a result of some of the claimed billions of followers being fed up with them. This may be consistent with what the Pope actually wants if it resulted in a smaller, purer Church.

In relation to the Protest the Pope coalition, Terry stressed that it was not a confrontational campaign and there would be no attempt to arrest the Pope during his visit – it was simply a campaign to ensure that he knew that people contested his views.

As a visiting Head of State, Terry questioned his right to criticise the equality laws of the host State (i.e. the UK) particularly when the people of the host State were proud of those laws.

Although the campaign had started with a focus on the cost to the UK taxpayer, a number of other issues had now been raised by other groups – child abuse, gay rights and others – and the campaign now included them all.

Terry closed with an appeal to people to make their views known by joining the Protest the Pope march in Central London on 18<sup>th</sup> September (1.30pm, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2010, Hyde Park Corner (top of Piccadilly)).

**David Pollock, President & Trustee of the European Humanist Federation:**

David looked at the influence of the Vatican on the European Union.

David started by summarising some of the views of the Pope which raised concerns, including his opposition of abortion, even for young rape victims; his opposition to the use of condoms, even from the prevention of serious illness; his view that saving the world from homosexuality was as important as saving the rain forests and his statement that the ordination of women as priests was as much a sin as child abuse.

He went on to describe some of the ways in which Vatican influence was spreading into many areas managed by the EU such as trade and human right law.

The Vatican has demanded formal status in relation to the EU. In 1997 the Amsterdam Treaty acknowledged that and, as a result, many EU rules relating to equality and the provision of goods and services have exemptions written into them, exemptions which David said had been extended even further within the UK.

The demands being made by the Vatican were steadily increasing, including advance consultation on many issues, regular meetings and an actual presence within EU offices. All of these demands had been granted except the last and it was now written into EU law that a “regular dialogue is maintained” with the Vatican.

Nevertheless, still not satisfied, the Vatican was seeking seminars for EU officials, to present them with their views and perspectives. Despite many unpublicised talks between the EU and the Vatican (and other religions) on secular issues still more was demanded, putting them in a very special and privileged position. David emphasised that amongst world religions, only the Vatican had the wealth, diplomatic service and infrastructure to exploit their privileged position to the full.

The issues raised by these questions on EU Education, Research, Family Law and Overseas Aid policies, amongst others, should not be ignored. The protests were not about some relic of an out of date dogma but about an important part of the future for the EU as the Vatican continued to consolidate its power.

David concluded by exhorting "Let's have a secular society. Protest the Pope."

**Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society:**

Keith dealt with some of the specific issues relating to child abuse within the Catholic Church and on the relationship between the Vatican and the United Nations.

He started by saying that a prominent blogger had predicted that at the meeting the Pope and the Catholic Church in general would be accused of all sorts of evils and that followers of the faith would be insulted as being "wicked, ignorant or deluded". He stressed that this would *not* be the case and he went on to praise the huge amount of relief work and other aid that was provided by Catholic organisations, suggesting, however, that maybe this was in spite of, rather than because of, the present approach of the Vatican.

Keith suggested that prominent Catholic MPs and pressure groups who supported the views of the Pope and the Vatican were not representative of Catholics generally and that their hardline views should not be blindly followed, with insidious threats of excommunication if they were not.

Focusing on child abuse, Keith described its extent within the Catholic Church as “absolutely staggering”, with several billion Euros and Dollars paid out to victims across many, many countries and with Church leaders implicated in having knowledge of what was happening in many cases. He accepted that the level of child abuse was now much lower than in the past and that changes had been made but he could not accept the Church’s argument that it “didn’t know”. He told of people talking about it in the 1950s and 1960s and of a secret treatment centre for priests with personal problems including paedophilia, based in New Mexico but with a branch in Gloucestershire, run by the Servants of the Paraclete.

In relation to the Pope personally, Keith pointed out that as Cardinal Ratzinger he was the “Chief Enforcer” for the Vatican during a large part of the period when child abuse had spiralled out of control and it was inconceivable that he could not have known what was going on. Keith mentioned a number of specific examples of cases in which the Pope must have had knowledge of what was happening:

- A trial involving the abuse of 200 deaf boys in Wisconsin which was halted after a letter to him (when Cardinal Ratzinger)
- Concerns over the good of the universal church being raised in relation to the conviction of a priest in California
- Cardinal Law from Boston being allowed to flee to the Vatican and being honoured, with Pope Benedict XVI allowing him to take his high position within the Basilica in Rome
- Allowing the Papal Nuncio in Ireland to refuse to give evidence to Inquiries and a Government Commission

- The leader of the Legionnaires of Christ in Mexico being a serial child abuser

Keith said that there were many more examples, but the problem was actually systematic. The Vatican, as a sovereign State, was literally a law unto itself, with its own system of Canon Law. It was not subject to Italian Law and was an absolute monarchy, created by Mussolini.

The Vatican was subject to the United Nations and various issues had been raised there, with allegations that it was in breach of Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their response had been duplicitous, blaming gays, protestant churches and others for being worse rather than confronting their own problems.

Keith closed by suggesting that the Catholic Church has “not got it” and saying that everyone who believed that should put pressure on them to change by taking part in the protests.

### **Peter Tatchell, Human Rights Campaigner:**

In a wide-ranging speech, Peter talked of a whole range of different issues , focusing on Catholic dissent from the Pope’s hardline, intolerant views. He has provided the entire text of his speech which is reproduced below:

Pope Benedict comes to Britain next month. As democrats, we believe he has every right to come here and express his opinions. But we also have a right to protest against his often harsh, extreme views. We have a right to say that he is not welcome.

The Protest the Pope campaign is calling on the British government to disassociate itself from the Pope's intolerant teachings on issues such as women's rights, gay equality and the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV. On these and many other issues, Benedict is out of step with the majority of British people, including most Catholics.

We also object to his visit being funded by the taxpayer. Much of his itinerary involves religious and spiritual events. It is not appropriate that these are paid for by the public. After all, we don't fund visits by the Grand Mufti of Mecca or the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem.

On so many important social issues, the Pope rejects human rights.

Pope Benedict opposes women's ordination. Women are deemed unfit to preach the gospel. This is an insult to the whole female sex. The implication of the Pope's teaching is that women have no moral capability or capacity for spiritual leadership. This is pure patriarchy, sexism and misogyny.

The Pope says artificial contraception is a sin. He condemns poor parents to having large families that they can't care for adequately. In some countries, priests spread the lie that contraception makes women sick.

Pope Benedict opposes IVF fertility treatment, to give childless couples the chance of parenthood. This is odd. The Catholic Church says having children is God's will but denies this option of parenthood to infertile couples.

The Pope rejects potentially life-saving embryonic stem cell research, which could help find cures for terrible illnesses like motor neurone disease - saving lives and improving people's quality of life. Surely this research is fulfilling Christian values and ideals?

Benedict XVI has denounced the use of condoms, even to stop the spread of HIV. He has also claimed that condom usage may "increase" the rate of HIV infection. His dishonest teachings discourage a proven way to reduce HIV transmission; thereby putting millions of lives at risk.

(<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/lancet-says-pope-distorting-condom-facts-1655647.html>)

The Pope has colluded with the Vatican's promotion of the lie that condoms spread HIV because latex is porous to the virus (sic). This is an outrageous falsehood and has been condemned as untrue and irresponsible by scientists and medical professionals.

In 1992, When he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he authored a Vatican document that condemned homosexuality as an "objective disorder" and a "strong tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil." Rejecting the concept of gay human rights, the document asserted that there is no "right" to laws protecting homosexual people against discrimination, suggesting that the civil liberties of lesbians and gay men can be "legitimately limited for objectively disordered external conduct."

(<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Some+considerations+concerning+the+Catholic+response+to+legislative...-a0128671084>)

The Pope has attacked same-sex marriages as "evil" and vilified supporters of gay equality as "gravely immoral." He has also denounced homosexual equality as a "deviant trend" and condemned same-sex love as being "without any social value." He even threatened to excommunicate Catholic legislators who voted for gay rights

laws.

While condemning loving, consenting adult same-sex relations, the Pontiff played a role in shielding Catholic clergy guilty of child sex abuse from prosecution.

In 2001, Pope Benedict wrote a letter to all Catholic Bishops, which ordered Papal silence concerning allegations of child sex abuse. He instructed the Bishops to report all such cases to him in Rome, so the idea that he did not know about sex abuse by priests is nonsense. His letter did not tell Bishops to report the abusers to the police.

The esteemed Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, said the Pope bears co-responsibility for the cover-up and that Benedict has failed to apologise for his own personal shortcomings during the child sex abuse scandal.

For more than two decades, as a Cardinal and as a Pope, Joseph Ratzinger has attempted to reverse the liberalising trends of the Second Vatican Council - pushing the whole church back to a more orthodox, conservative agenda. He's strengthening the hierarchy and autocracy of the Vatican and the Papacy.

This has prompted a grassroots Catholic revolt - the "We are Church" movement - which seeks a more democratic, transparent, accountable church.

The Pope has condemned liberation theology, as espoused by Catholic theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff, and he has opposed the worker priest movement. He preaches social justice but attacks those clergy who advocate political action to reform society and make it more just.

Earlier this year, Pope Benedict rescinded the excommunication of Bishop Richard Williamson who, in 2008, denied key elements of the Holocaust; claiming that a maximum of 300,000 Jews died in concentration camps and that none were gassed by the Nazis.

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7869565.stm>)

Benedict has also paved the way for eventual sainthood of Pope, Pius XII, despite the war-time pontiff's failure to speak out publicly, either during or after the Holocaust, against the Nazi mass murder of six million Jews and millions of others, including Russian, Polish, disabled, gay and Roma people - and many more.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/21/pope-benedict-moves-pius-closer-sainthood>)

Pius XII was no saint. The fact that Pope Benedict wants to makes him a saint shows how far he has strayed from the moral and ethical values of most Catholics and most of humanity.

## **Jeremy Rodell, Chair of the South West London Humanists Group:**

Jeremy took a more local perspective and in particular focused on the demand for a Catholic secondary school in the Borough of Richmond upon Thames. Again he started by stressing that he was not anti-Catholic *per se*.

He was concerned that the visit of the Pope to the Borough was being used as a springboard to revive plans for a Catholic secondary school in the Borough, with an article on the subject appearing in the local paper on the very day the visit was announced. These plans, which apparently have the support of the new council leader, are based on the argument that parents would like to have a choice, that there were several Catholic primary schools and that the Borough is one of few that does not have a Catholic secondary school.

Jeremy argued that this logic was flawed – just because discriminatory practices in primary schools existed was no basis for compounding that with a discriminatory secondary school. He described discrimination in education as an “anachronism”, stressing that this argument applied to all faith schools, not just Catholic ones and mentioning a Church of England secondary school in Kingston as another example.

Jeremy closed by pointing out that whilst the Pope’s visit would soon be forgotten, any new school would remain for decades and so the importance of challenging any impetus to the introduction of a Catholic secondary school provided by the visit was clear. He encouraged people to engage with the local campaign and attend meetings that would be arranged to further discuss the issue.

## **Neil D'Aguiar, Catholic Voices:**

Neil had been suggested by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster who had been invited to provide a speaker to present the counter arguments to the issues raised by the previous speakers. He was a member of the organisation called Catholic Voices, a group of lay Catholics who made themselves available to present the Catholic perspective to the media and others.

He introduced himself as being a teacher at a Catholic Secondary School in the Kingston area and thus as having a particular interest in the issues raised by Jeremy. He emphasised that there were pupils from a whole range of backgrounds in his school, like all Catholic schools, and that many of them were very challenging about Catholic teaching, meaning that he spent a considerable amount of time explaining that teaching to them, not only to get them through exams but to ensure that Catholic teachings were acceptable to their enquiring minds. He mentioned that some Catholic school pupils were likely to be members of the Protest the Pope movement or the Secular Society.

He praised the “well-delivered” speeches on the range of different issues and said that it would take a long time to deal with each one in detail. He said that many went back to the basic issue of the current Pope and a misunderstanding of his position. In school he tried to explain using logic, not by quoting teaching or doctrine or documents, and that is the approach he would take here.

Neil started by emphasising that Catholics are not prejudiced towards LGBT people. They believe in equal rights and don't apply prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation, treating people as individuals. He stated that he personally would not stand for any discrimination.

On the issue of the ordination of women priests, Neil explained that the issue was not so clear cut as electing someone to Parliament or something like that –

the revealed truths of the faith were handed down by God. He also mentioned that as he was married, he too was discriminated against in terms of ordination.

In relation to fertility treatment, he pointed out that artificial insemination by a husband was perfectly permissible within marriage and that opposition to stem cell research was only in relation to *embryonic* stem cells, not adult stem cells. He emphasised the scientific research showed that the latter were more productive in any event and so their position in relation to embryonic stem cells was simply pointing out something that science agreed with anyway.

Referring back to the previous speeches, Neil said that it had been difficult to bite his tongue at times as there was a selective history being portrayed. He asked people to keep an open mind and listen to both sides of the argument. In relation to the issue of child abuse, he referred to the 2001 document mentioned by Peter Tatchell and said to order all incidents to be reported to himself (as Cardinal Ratzinger) and not the police. In fact, Neil said, the document emphasised that the ultimate responsibility under Canon Law was to report incidents to the police and that it was misleading to portray the document as saying otherwise. The requirement to report all incidents directly to Cardinal Ratzinger was actually intended to ensure that they were dealt with properly and was not intended to be an alternative to reporting them to the police.

Neil went on to say that there was no denial of the existence of child abuse and no argument that it was anything but awful and inexcusable. But he emphasised that many things had been put in place to stop it happening again and that incidents were now very low. There was transparency too, with the Catholic Church in England and Wales publishing annual statistics. Child Protection Policies were in place in all parishes and, as a Catholic and a teacher, he could say that they were more stringent than those in place in many schools.

The situation had changed when the Church was called to account by the media and at that stage Cardinal Ratzinger had made it his personal job to make the necessary changes, putting aside his time on every Friday to deal with the issue despite pressure from others not to spend so much time on it. He insisted on taking that approach as he personally believed it was so important to deal with it. Neil said that none of the “evidence” had stuck and that whilst there was no denial that things had been wrong, it was not right to vilify the person who had actually brought it to light and had made the Catholic Church one of the safest institutions in relation to child abuse.

Turning to the HIV and condom issue, Neil said that there was a British Medical Journal article which dealt with research which supported the view that HIV / AIDS in Catholic countries was significantly lower than in non-Catholic countries. A comparison between two countries with similarly serious HIV / AIDS problems – Uganda (primarily Catholic) and Rwanda (primarily non-Catholic) – there was a 30% difference in infection rates. This showed that HIV / AIDS was not stopped by condoms alone and there was a need to address issues of rape, casual sex, etc. and to encourage people to wait for a long-term relationship to reduce the incidence of HIV / AIDS further. Neil said that the Catholic Church wasn't saying that condoms are not effective, just that they're not the only answer.

He concluded by saying that he had dealt briefly with the main issues raised and would take further questions later.

#### **Vice Chair, Richmond upon Thames LGBT Forum:**

The Vice Chair of the LGBT Forum who had organised the meeting drew it to a close with another local perspective. As the voice of the local LGBT community the Forum had been shocked to find out about the visit of the Pope to

Twickenham to address 3000 young people from around the UK on an education theme. As these young people were possibly the future leaders and educators of our country there was a concern that if the Pope were to repeat the messages discussed earlier then all the work on challenging homophobia, transphobia, hatred and hostility, including that work done with other equality strands, could be undermined. For him to come to the Borough and indoctrinate 3000 young people with his out-of-date, hardline views would set things back a generation.

In particular, he emphasised that, statistically speaking, some 300-350 of the young people would themselves be LGBT and he asked how would they be protected from the hardline messages? How would they be served by the hardline messages?

He closed by saying that a variety of actions had been considered by the Forum – ranging from taking part in peaceful physical protest to writing to the local council and others raising the issues of concern – and he asked for anyone with suggestions for other practical steps that could be taken to challenge the views of the Pope and the Vatican to raise them during the questions later. Finally he emphasised the importance of getting the message out to local people so that they could decide for themselves whether to challenge the fact that he as being honoured with the State visit despite his views and teachings.

**Baroness Tonge, Former Member of Parliament for Richmond Park:**

Baroness Tonge was unable to attend the meeting but sent this message of support:

“Sorry I cannot be with you tonight but I am busy sorting out a student who has just left Gaza for the first time in his life. The Pope’s visit to this country is an insult to those people who have suffered because of the policies and pronouncements by the Catholic Church on women priests, contraception and abortion, and the Church’s

incomprehensible attitude to gay and lesbian people. I simply cannot see the logic behind any of it because, by denying these things, the Church causes immeasurable suffering.

The Catholic Church is not the only culprit of course. Many religions seem to impose misery on their adherents, but those followers can always leave their church or ignore the extremes.

The recent revelations on paedophilia in the Catholic Church are a disgrace.

I still subscribe to the John Stuart Mill principle of personal freedom for all, providing that it does not interfere with the freedom of others and therefore I must accept that there are people who agree with the Pope, but I cannot accept that they should try to impose that view on others.

This Papal visit is a mistake and I only hope that he will be greeted in TOTAL SILENCE, maybe with a few well chosen words written on banners.

Dignity in dissent should be our motto.

With kind regards and love to you all."

Jenny  
Baroness Tonge  
House of Lords  
London