ONE LIFE

Dorset Humanists Magazine

30th Anniversary Year 1996-2026 *September 2026*



Christian Nationalism

Is it a threat?

One Life Café: Saturday 12th September
2.00pm Moordown Community Centre
Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Christian nationalism has become a major concern for humanists in the United States, where powerful movements seek to reaffirm America as a fundamentally Christian nation. But what exactly is Christian nationalism – and does it pose a similar threat here in Britain? Just back from the World Humanist Congress in Ottawa, **David Warden** leads a discussion on why humanists are worried about its growing influence and whether American anxieties translate to the UK. In this interactive One Life Café, we'll examine what Christian nationalists actually believe, why the movement has grown, and how British humanists should respond. *George Locke's session on the history of sex has been postponed owing to family illness.*

Gossip: guilty pleasure or social necessity?

Humanist Forum: 7.30pm Thursday 24th September at Bournemouth Westcliff Hotel, 7 Durley Chine Road, BH2 5JS

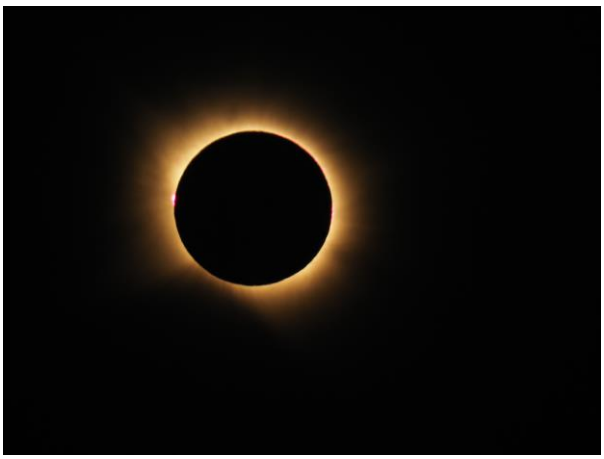
Many people enjoy a good gossip – especially if it involves saying unpleasant things about someone who is not there to stand up for him- or herself. Yet while gossip can seem unkind or trivial, sociologists suggest that it may play an important role in maintaining social bonds and reinforcing shared norms. Does gossip help communities function, or does it risk harming reputations and trust? And is there such a thing as responsible gossip? **Simon Whipple** will lead a thoughtful discussion on the merits and pitfalls of talking about others.

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HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227

Click for events

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Moonshots

Dorset Humanists committee member **Dean Robertson** travelled to Spain to witness the total eclipse of the Sun on 12 August 2026. Dean is a keen photographer and he captured these images.

Totality crossed Greenland, Iceland and northern Spain, among other areas. From the UK it was a very substantial partial eclipse – around 90% of the Sun was obscured in much of Britain.

The Moon is about 400 times smaller in diameter than the Sun, but the Sun is also about 400 times farther away. Consequently, their angular sizes in our sky are very similar. During a total solar eclipse the Moon can therefore cover the Sun's bright photosphere almost precisely while leaving the solar corona visible.

The Moon is gradually moving away from Earth at about 3.8 cm per year. Hundreds of millions of years ago it appeared appreciably larger in our sky; hundreds of millions of years from now it will appear too small for total solar eclipses. We happen to live during an astronomical era in which the match is particularly good.

Dates for your diary

Thursday 3rd September 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Dean.
Saturday 12th September 2.00pm	Moordown	One Life Café: Christian Nationalism – is it a threat?
Friday 18th September 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel social hosted by Sandra. No set agenda.
Thursday 24th September 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Humanist Forum: Education: Gossip – guilty pleasure or social necessity? Discussion led by Simon Lucie-Whipple.
Thursday 1st October 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Dean.
Saturday 10th October 2.00pm	Moordown	One Life Café: Inheritocracy – should we always put family first? Led by Cathy Silman
Please check all events nearer the time on Meetup in case of any changes.		


DORSET HUMANISTS
30TH
ANNIVERSARY
You are invited
Celebrate 30 years of humanism
in Bournemouth and beyond!
MOORDOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE
21 Coronation Ave, Bournemouth BH9 1TW
SATURDAY 14TH NOVEMBER 2026
1.30PM – 4.00PM
Buffet lunch and
drinks provided
PLEASE RSVP BY 31ST OCTOBER 2026
to secure your place.
07910 886629 or chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk
We look forward to celebrating with you!



The 21st World Humanist Congress took place in Ottawa, Canada, from 7–9 August. Organised by Humanists International and Humanist Canada, it brought together 500 humanists from around the world to exchange ideas, strengthen international partnerships and discuss the future of the humanist movement. This year's theme was Humanism as Resistance, exploring how humanist values can respond to contemporary global challenges. As an Associate Member of Humanists International, Dorset Humanists was represented at the Congress by our Chair, David Warden who reports on the Congress below.



When I informed my husband John that the 2026 World Humanist Congress had been relocated from Washington to Ottawa his response was immediate and enthusiastic: "Let's have an extended summer holiday in Canada." Apart from the Congress arrangements, he organised our wonderful trip which also took us to French-speaking Quebec City and Montreal.

The focus of this report, however, is the Congress itself. This was the third World Humanist Congress I have attended. The earlier ones were in Oxford (2014) and Copenhagen (2023). This one was rather more politically charged, given that it had originally been scheduled to take place in Washington DC. It was moved because the organisers (American Atheists and the American Humanist Association) concluded that the changing political climate in the United States, including tighter immigration and travel restrictions, could make attendance difficult or unsafe for some international delegates, particularly those from the Global South. Even so, it appears that some delegates were unable to get Canadian visas.

Three distinguished keynote speakers provided some of the intellectual highlights of the Congress. **Rebecca Newberger Goldstein**, the American philosopher and novelist, spoke about the forces of tribalism and polarisation that can divide us. **Professor Francesca Klug**, the British human-rights academic who advised the UK Government on the Human Rights Act, argued that human rights themselves are a form of resistance, protecting universal human dignity against oppression and the unchecked power of majorities. **Professor A. C. Grayling**, the British philosopher, author and Vice-President of Humanists UK, brought the Congress to a close with a defence of "rational hope": hope grounded not in wishful thinking but in what human beings can actually do to defend democracy, freedom and the rule of law and create a better future.

One of the most striking sessions was jointly chaired by **Fish Stark** who is CEO of the American Humanist Association and **Nick Fish**, President of American Atheists. Yes, there were lots of fish jokes at their expense! Together, they described the growing influence of Christian nationalism in the ▶

United States. Broadly speaking, Christian nationalism seeks to fuse American national identity with a particular conservative understanding of Christianity, challenging the secular principle that government should remain neutral between religions and between religion and non-religion. At its more extreme, it can appear less like a campaign for religious freedom than a movement for Christian supremacy, seeking to privilege Christian beliefs and values in law, education and public life. Stark and Fish argued that this movement has become increasingly influential in American politics and represents a serious threat to religious pluralism, the rights of non-religious people and the constitutional separation of church and state.

In the latest issue of *New Humanist*, Humanists UK CEO Andrew Copson discusses Christian nationalism with former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who acknowledges its dangers but plays down the likelihood of American-style Christian nationalism gaining serious political traction in Britain.

Humanists International General Assembly

As a representative of Dorset Humanists, which is a member of Humanists International, I was able to attend its General Assembly as an observer and was present when the Ottawa Declaration on Humanism as Resistance was adopted. The Declaration argues that humanism should be not merely a set of values but an active approach to life, calling on humanists to resist authoritarianism, warmongering, dehumanisation, hatred, irrationality and attacks on freedom of thought and expression; to defend human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law; and to ensure that new technologies remain accountable to human beings. I had previously contributed feedback on the draft and felt that some politically charged terms needed clearer definition: words such as authoritarianism, hate and demagoguery can sometimes be applied too loosely to people or movements with whom we disagree. I was particularly pleased that the final Declaration refers to “extreme nationalism” and “chauvinistic nationalism”, rather than nationalism without qualification. This seemed important because attachment to one’s nation and national culture is not in itself incompatible with humanism; indeed, the Amsterdam Declaration itself distinguishes “authoritarian nationalism” from nationalism as such.

Implications for Dorset Humanists

The Declaration concludes by asking Humanists International's member organisations to build “open and outward-facing humanist communities”, encourage active citizenship, strengthen democratic institutions and translate its principles into locally appropriate action. What might that mean for Dorset Humanists? In many respects we are already doing it: promoting humanism in schools, providing a welcoming humanist community, encouraging reasoned discussion about difficult questions, and creating opportunities for people with different views to talk to one another. We could perhaps think further about how we encourage active citizenship and defend the secular, democratic and human-rights principles on which an open society depends. But one particularly important form of resistance for us should, I think, be resistance to polarisation and political tribalism itself. Humanists will legitimately disagree about politics, including about which contemporary movements pose the greatest threats to our values. Our task should not be to impose a political orthodoxy, but to promote democracy, freedom of thought, reason, human dignity and constructive engagement across political differences. In that sense, perhaps one of the most humanistic things we can resist is the temptation to turn people with whom we disagree into an alien “other”.

You can read the Ottawa Declaration on the next two pages. Let us know what you think.

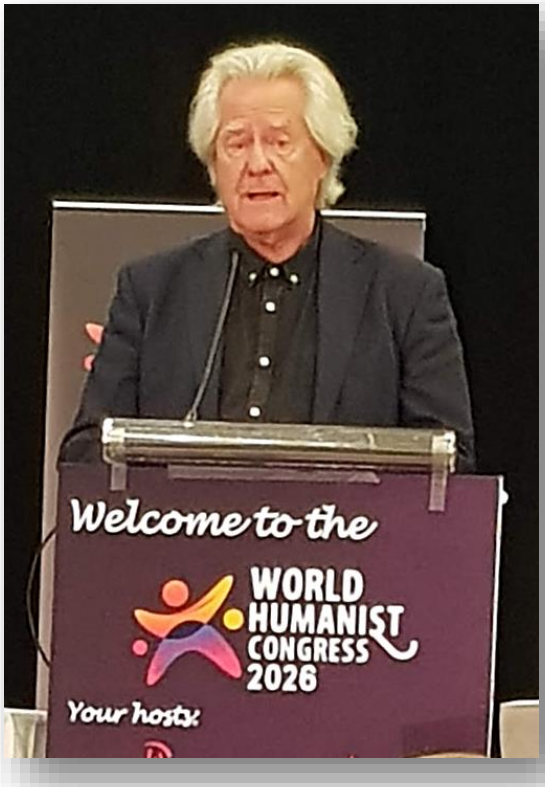
The Ottawa Declaration on Humanism as Resistance

The World Humanist Congress, meeting in Ottawa, Canada, in 2026, declares:

1. Humanism is not just a set of values but an active approach to life. We reaffirm the progressive and optimistic vision of our Amsterdam Declaration: that every human has the right to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. But human progress is not automatic or inevitable. In times of global challenges and global insecurity, humanists need to not just imagine a better future, but to act. We must defend the foundations that make a better future possible and resist the forces that undermine that vision.
2. We stand against the global resurgence of authoritarianism and warmongering. We reject the extreme nationalism and demagoguery that together threaten peace and stability in every part of the world. And we stand united against encroaching limits on the right to freedom of thought and expression, including through weaponization of police action, the rise of political intimidation, and the escalation of state censorship to silence humanists and other human rights defenders.
3. We stand against the normalizing of hate and dehumanization. Dehumanization consistently paves the way for discrimination, persecution, and mass atrocities by making the suffering of other people appear to be acceptable or deserved. It is the precursor to most violations of human rights. We fiercely oppose the resurgence of irrationality, science-denial, and the deliberate spread of misinformation and hate that poisons public discourse. We condemn racism, xenophobia, and the incitement of hatred and of violence against minority groups, often cynically justified in the name of religious freedom, and remind all institutions and the people within them that every human life possesses equal and inherent value.
4. We stand against the erosion of dignity by new technologies. We urge governments to guard against the development of technological systems which lack human empathy or amplify discrimination through bias. All forms of technology must remain accountable to human beings and aligned with human dignity, empathy, democratic oversight, and our ethical responsibilities. We commit to protecting our inner lives and the right to privacy from digital surveillance, whether from governments or private corporations.
5. We affirm the power of individual agency. Resistance begins with the recognition that all people possess an innate capacity to shape a more just future. By embracing the universal ethical norms enshrined in international human rights treaties and declarations and by practising active critical thinking, all people can develop greater individual agency and shared capacity to organize and challenge oppression. We champion moral education and rational inquiry alongside the cultivation of radical hope as a deliberate, strategic act of defiance against the despair upon which demagogues rely.

6. We commit to compassionate solidarity. Authoritarianism thrives on isolation; humanism thrives on connection. We recognize that the burden of advocacy can exact a heavy personal toll on human rights defenders and we also extend our empathy and solidarity to those who must remain silent out of a justifiable fear of reprisal, particularly those living under repressive regimes or forced to conceal their thoughts and identities. We commit to listening to and learning from those who have been marginalized and we pledge to build resilient grassroots communities that provide safe havens for vulnerable voices so no one has to resist alone.
7. We defend democratic institutions and human rights frameworks. Personal resilience alone is not enough. For individuals to be effectively protected, individuals must join forces to build systemic defenses. We commit to strengthening national humanist organisations and to ongoing training and support for humanist leaders. We pledge to use and defend existing international human rights frameworks, the rule of law, and democratic processes to hold unchecked power to account. We commit to reforming those institutions where they are failing, particularly in terms of equitable access and non-discrimination.
8. We call for humanists to step up in the public square with courage and confidence. We must engage in democratic processes; defend secular institutions; publicly challenge chauvinistic nationalism, warmongering, misinformation, disinformation, and irrationality; and unapologetically advocate for human rights on both the national and international stage.

We call on all Humanists International Members to build and support open and outward-facing humanist communities; educate their members for active citizenship; work to strengthen democratic institutions in their own nations; and work collaboratively to transform the principles expressed here into practical, locally adaptable calls to action, so that every humanist, wherever they are, can find a meaningful way to resist.



Professor Anthony Grayling (left) gave the concluding speech at the World Humanist Congress. Andrew Copson OBE (below), former President of Humanists International and current CEO of Humanists UK, spoke on one of the discussion panels.

Congress photos are here.





Letters & Emails

It's your column…

From Jonathan Crozier on pride flags and religious homophobia

Full marks and a gold star for Aaron's article about – to use the modern word – the *disconnect* between society's perception of ordinary "invisible" homosexuals, and its perception of those of the exaggeratedly visible type. Like Aaron and David, I too have found myself increasingly alienated from those who, supposedly, have been there to protect and promote my well-being.

A notable number of members and supporters of Dorset Humanists have a religious past. Over the years I have increasingly had my thoughts about religion, but recently my worst fears were confirmed when I came across a rant about immorality in a religious publication. Predictably, it was heavily laced with religious homophobia. Indeed, as the popular wisdom has it, "There is no hate like Christian love!" Europe appears to be repeating history as things seem eerily similar to Weimar Germany in the period before authoritarianism took hold.

Flags

Now to the matter of vexillology (flags). Those with a knowledge of the rule of tincture will appreciate that the progress pride flag is not a good design. No wonder it continues to cause conceptual confusion. I would have much preferred something including an inverted pink triangle and a black border to commemorate those who were tortured and murdered in Sachsenhausen (the Auschwitz for homosexuals).

Ann Widdecombe

It is ironic that a religious homophobe as ferocious as Ann Widdecombe died the type of death known to have been meted out to homosexuals in Sachsenhausen. She opposed ALL homosexual law reform. It is there in her voting record as an MP. Her public statements concerning homosexuals are certainly no better. What has shocked me, therefore, is her virtual "canonization" as a saint by most of the people I have spoken to about her!

Robert Ingersoll

For the exceptionally perceptive and wise humanist Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899), the true civilization is where every man gives to every other every right that he claims for himself. Ingersoll believed in equal human rights for all, and so do I. Widdecombe did not. A mere cursory glance at Afghanistan or Iran shows what the alternative can ultimately mean. I am a member of the National Secular Society because it believes in the separation of religion and state. I never want to see my country subjected to any version of the Taliban, Christian or otherwise. When religion goes completely mad nobody and nothing is safe, are they!?



Progress pride flag: a cause of "conceptual confusion"



An alternative design to commemorate the thousands of gay men murdered by the Nazis

From Aaron – are you recycling your soft plastics?

Most of us recycle bottles, tins, paper and cardboard without giving it much thought. But what about all that flimsy plastic that can't normally go into our household recycling — crisp packets, bread and vegetable bags, cereal liners, food pouches, film lids, cling film and the wrapping around multipacks?

Rather than putting mine in the general rubbish, I save it up and take it to the soft-plastics recycling point at Tesco. Other large supermarkets offer similar schemes. Tesco says the plastic it collects is sorted and, wherever possible, recycled into things such as bags for life, garden furniture and planters. Material that cannot currently be recycled may instead be used to generate energy — but none of it is sent directly to landfill.

As humanists, caring about the one life we have also means caring about the one planet we have to live it on. It takes very little effort to keep a separate bag for soft plastics and drop it off when you're next at the supermarket. Mine is usually rather spectacularly full by the time I get there!



Aaron doing his bit

From Leilia Dore, Celebrant Network Manager, Humanists UK

Would anyone in your group like to train to conduct civic ceremonies in your community? If so, now is your chance! Apply to train this autumn on 20 September or 22 November.

Civic ceremonies can be anything from memorials, Remembrance ceremonies, to the opening of new buildings and events. Humanist celebrants, pastoral carers, and members of local and partner groups are often asked to take part in these events to share humanist perspectives on shared experiences, alongside people of faith.

Our free online Civic Ceremonies training covers how to engage in these opportunities, how to advocate for humanist inclusion in events, and how to find the right words for the right occasion, whether you are a celebrant or just a confident public speaker. Whether you are already involved in events like these and want to feel more confident, or this is something you would love to get involved with, our training will help get you there.

If you or anyone else in your group are interested, please do apply asap.

Humanist Ceremonies™ by Humanists UK