

**Deloitte.**The Cambridge Union Society  
9A Bridge Street  
Cambridge, CB2 1UBEmail : [pressofficer@cus.org](mailto:pressofficer@cus.org)**PRESS RELEASE – 30.01.2015****“This House Would Disestablish the Church of England” featuring Stephen Fry and Giles Fraser.**

On Thursday 29 January, the Union hosted to great public excitement, a charged debate on the status of the Church of England.

The debate was opened by **Giles Fraser**, speaking in proposition. He is a Church of England priest and a columnist for *The Guardian*, and he expressed great distaste for the movement away from true religion in favour of complying with the government. Amongst some amusing references to *Jeeves and Wooster* and *Blackadder*, Giles Fraser explained that the Church is playing second fiddle to the government, and this can have dangerous consequences, citing as an example the Church's complicity with Hitler's regime in the 1930s. He asserted the problems of the Church being more about "dressing up than speaking out", as he sees it has now become, and concluded by saying the Church of England is "stronger when it takes its authority from the Good News of the Gospel and not from David Cameron."

Taking on the case for the opposition, in a surprising departure from his normal stance, was the much anticipated **Stephen Fry**. He presented the Church of England as endearing, and stressed the importance of empiricism, of seeing what actually works, rather than just following what one feels should work. Stephen Fry made comparison between Britain and the United States, a country with a fully separate church and state, and pointed out that Britain is a much more secular country. Indeed, he said, Britain is the "most secular country in Europe". He likened our position regarding the Church of England to that with the royal family, where one might expect not having a royal family to improve social justice, but if we examine the countries with the best standing in equality, they have constitutional monarchies. He took up the stance that the Church of England is a force for good, because it has, in his view, in fact done much to make Britain a secular, non-religious country. He also pointed out that the Church of England really isn't such a bad thing, praising the country for allowing him to get married to Elliott Spencer recently, gaining much applause from the audience.

The first round of floor speeches prompted Giles Fraser to bring up the fact that it was the government that had made it illegal for him to marry same-sex couples, not his own religious beliefs.

The debate was then continued for the proposition by **Andrew Copson**, the youngest ever Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association. He stressed that incredibly small numbers of people who are members of the C of E, and the even smaller number who actually attend services, and yet despite this it was a "disproportionate invisible power", slowing legislation and greatly affecting governmental decision. He also posited that the Church of England leads those of other faiths within this country to believe that indoctrination within schools is normal, and concluded by terming the Church a "present and living example of discrimination and privilege".

**Colin Bloom**, Chief Executive of the Conservative Christian Fellowship, furthered the case for the opposition, good-humouredly accusing the opposition bench of insurrection and aiming to create a "godless republic", alluding to the French Revolution. He asserted that our system is not broken and therefore it does not need fixing, and drew attention to the things we could risk losing if we did disestablish the Church, such as chaplains in prisons and hospitals, and pillars of our cultural tradition.

Concluding the proposition's side was **Nia Griffith**, MP for Llanelli and Shadow Minister for Wales. She echoed Andrew Copson's sentiments that institutions should reflect the reality of modern Britain, and that having an established Church that is against the will of the people is counterintuitive. She pointed out that the Church has held back state policy, giving the example of gender equality being held back by the Church stalling in allowing female bishops, and she also made clear that nothing bad had happened when the Church was disestablished in Wales a hundred years ago.

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**The Right Reverend Tim Stevens** rounded off the debate. He is the Bishop of Leicester, and drew greatly on his personal experiences to passionately describe the sense of community in his city. He spoke of Leicester Cathedral as a meeting place where leaders from all faiths came to stand in solidarity, and also pointed out that the Church of England has done many good things, including providing a facet of government which is not a mutable political party.

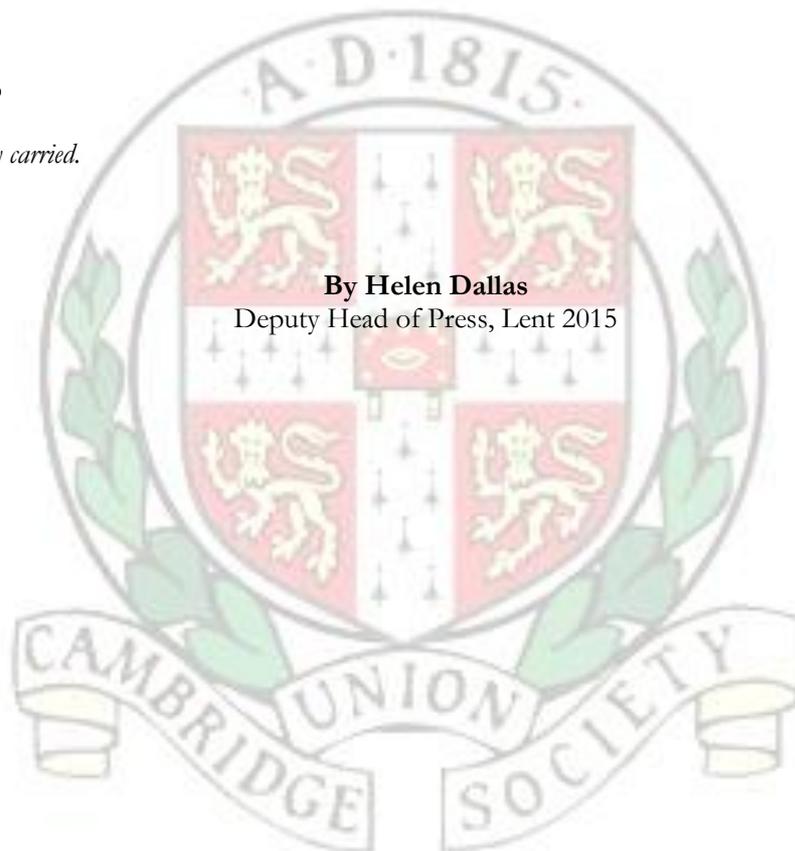
After the debate a wedding cake was presented to Stephen Fry as a gift from Two Little Cats Bakery.

**Debate Result**

Ayes: 60%

Noes: 20%

Abstentions: 20%

*The motion was duly carried.***By Helen Dallas**  
Deputy Head of Press, Lent 2015**PRESS OFFICE**