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PRIME MINISTER

## EDUCATION REFORM BILL: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

1. Nigel Wicks wrote on 14 March requesting notes on the statutory position regarding Christianity as the basis for religious education and collective worship, and the effects of the amendments which Caroline Cox wishes to table. I attach such a note. You also asked for advice on the tactics which the Government should follow.

2. I have had a series of discussions with the leaders of the churches, culminating last week, with separate discussions with Cardinal Hume and the Bishop of London. Both, as you know, have been concerned about the implications for RE in the national curriculum. Both want to reinforce the position of RE in non-church schools. They have also made clear to me the difficulties which Caroline Cox's amendments will cause them. They have therefore proposed certain amendments with which they both agree, on the broad principles which should govern statutory provision for RE and its place in the curriculum. This is now their agreed position and they want to present it as the government and the churches working together.

3. Both the Catholics and the Church of England are not seeking RE to be a "foundation subject" in the terms of the Education Reform Bill as defined in clause 3. So we have been able to agree on amendments which do no damage to the principles of the national curriculum and of the statutory arrangements for RE which we have been seeking to protect. We can therefore meet the concerns of both churches - and indeed go further to strengthen and enliven the agreed syllabus arrangements. The amendments we have agreed are as follows:

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- i) RE will be identified in clause 2 of the Bill as part of the "basic curriculum" offered to all compulsory school age children by every maintained school and it will precede the core and foundation subjects. It will not however be a "foundation subject" with all that implies for central and secular determination. Bishop Konstant, who speaks for the Catholic church on education matters, in a meeting with Cardinal Hume specifically said that this to him was an absolutely fundamental change and was not in the least cosmetic. That view was echoed by the Bishop of London when I saw him last Thursday.
- ii) the existing agreed syllabus procedures for county and controlled schools will be strengthened. Standing Advisory Conferences for Religious Education (SACREs) for each LEA will be made compulsory rather than optional as at present under the 1944 Act.
- iii) LEAs will be required to review their agreed syllabuses for RE if required to do so by the unanimous recommendation of their SACRE.

4. All of this is in my view very helpful. Cardinal Hume and the Bishop of London have arranged for their amendments to be tabled for discussion at Report stage on 23 March. I shall welcome them in principle, but seek their withdrawal for the wording to be looked at in more detail by Parliamentary Counsel. This would allow the Bishop of London to bring them forward in a correct format in his own name in the House of Lords.

5. I doubt whether we shall be able to persuade Caroline Cox not to table her amendments in the Lords. However, if we are seen to have reached agreement with the Churches on their fundamental concerns we shall be in a much stronger position to resist her amendments and to point out the very considerable difficulties that they would create. We would

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have the support of the Anglican Bishops and leading Catholic lay peers. The Methodists and the spokesmen for other non-Christian religions are also likely to be strongly opposed to the mention of Christian or Christian-based religious education and collective worship on the face of the Bill. This matter was debated in Committee in the House of Commons when Angela Rumbold resisted similar amendments and was supported by the other parties. I think that we should make full play of the agreement that I have reached with the Churches during proceedings in the House of Lords.

6. I am sending a copy of this letter to Lord Belstead and to Sir Robin Butler.

*KB.*

KB  
Department of Education and Science

21 March 1988

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EDUCATION REFORM BILL: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1. THE EXISTING STATUTORY POSITION

1.1 The law relating to religious education and collective worship in maintained schools is covered by sections 25-30 and Schedule 5 of the 1944 Act. Annex 1 details these provisions. In brief, all maintained schools are obliged to provide religious education and daily collective worship for all pupils at the school, subject to a right for parents to withdraw their children. RE in county and in practice in virtually all controlled schools has to be provided in accordance with an agreed syllabus drawn up locally by representatives of the LEA, teachers, and local churches automatically including the Church of England. RE in county schools must be non-denominational in character. In aided schools the governors determine what is provided in accordance with any trust deeds.

1.2 The Act requires that worship in county schools shall not be "distinctive of any particular religious denomination". Apart from this requirement it is for the school to determine content. For aided and controlled schools the content of worship is entirely a matter for the school to determine.

1.3 There is no requirement that either RE or worship in schools should be Christian in character.

2. DEBATE LEADING TO THE 1944 ACT

2.1 Annex 2 provides evidence of what was said by Government spokesmen during Parliamentary debates on the RE and collective worship provisions of the 1944 Act. There is no doubt that Ministers, reflecting normal expectations in 1944, anticipated that RE and worship would be essentially Christian, but non-denominational. But the intention was clearly to allow as many

pupils as possible to participate in both RE and worship, based on values acceptable to all parents. The press cutting attached at Annex 3, reporting a speech by R A Butler to a gathering of the Jewish community, shows that the Government envisaged representatives of the Jewish faith being involved in the drafting of agreed syllabuses for county schools. The term "denomination"<sup>was</sup> therefore seen by the Government to cover the Jewish as well as the Christian faith.

### 3. PROPOSALS RELATING TO RE AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN THE EDUCATION REFORM BILL

3.1 The Bill does not make religious education a "foundation subject" in the terms of the national curriculum because it is already compulsory and there were no reasons to disturb the existing local arrangements for determining the content of RE. However, in response to the consultation exercise and representations from the churches, the provisions of the 1944 Act are strengthened in the Bill by virtue of:

i. Clause 1 - which requires that the whole curriculum in maintained schools shall "promote the spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development of pupils at the school and of society";

ii. Clause 6(1)(c) - which places an explicit duty on LEAs, governors and headteachers to ensure that the statutory requirement to provide RE as required by the 1944 Act is complied with;

iii. Both the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council (established under clause 7 of the Bill) will have responsibilities for RE. Whilst not involved in the agreed syllabus procedures, the NCC will be responsible for keeping the whole curriculum under review, including RE. SEAC will keep all aspects of examinations and

assessment under review, including GCSE examinations for RE, and will advise the Secretary of State on his responsibilities under clause 5 of the Bill to approve such qualifications.

iv. Clause 15 - which provides for a procedure whereby parents and others can make a formal complaint where they believe the RE provisions of the 1944 Act are not being enforced.

3.2 For grant-maintained schools, clauses 67-79 enact the same statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for provision of RE as the 1944 Act provides for other maintained schools. The RE provided must be the same as was the case prior to the school becoming grant-maintained. Governors of GM schools using an agreed syllabus will have to be consulted if it is proposed to revise the syllabus. If a GM school wishes to change the nature of the RE they provide, clause 71 of the Bill provides for this to be the subject of a proposal for a change of character under clause 73. Such a proposal would have to be agreed by the Secretary of State. The Government has agreed that the trustees of a former aided school would be able to veto any proposals for a change of religious character.

3.3 Clause 89 of the Bill proposes changes to the collective worship provisions of the 1944 Act. The changes would allow schools to organise worship other than at the start of the school day and in groups smaller than an assembly of the whole school. The changes received the virtually unanimous support of all the church and educational interests consulted last year. The present law does not allow schools to organise separate acts of worship for children of different Christian denominations or different faiths, and clause 89 would not allow them to do so either. Nor does it change the requirement that the act of collective worship must be non-denominational.

#### 4. THE EFFECT OF LADY COX'S PROPOSALS

4.1 We understand that Lady Cox intends that the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship should be modified to require a daily act of Christian collective worship; and that the requirement that religious instruction shall be provided should be amended to require that religious instruction in the Christian faith should be provided. It is not clear whether she further intends that the content of the religious instruction should be prescribed centrally by the Secretary of State, or be left to the locally agreed syllabus procedure.

4.2 A requirement for county schools to offer a daily act of Christian worship would mean amending the provision that such acts should not be distinctive of any particular denomination to make clear that 'denomination' in this context referred only to different creeds within the Christian faith.

4.3 In practice, the change would be likely to result in greatly increased exercise of the parental right of withdrawal - particularly, in multi-faith communities. This would create unhealthy division between pupils (and their parents) and in many cases would pose very considerable organisational problems for schools. Practitioners of other faiths would certainly press for their children to have the opportunity for separately organised acts of worship according to their faith at the school.

4.4 A requirement that religious education offered by county schools should be Christian in character would require amendment not only to the provision that RE should not include any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of a particular denomination, but also amendment of the Schedule 5 agreed syllabus arrangements. Local churches other than the Christian churches would not be expected to participate in arrangements to agree a Christian syllabus. Alternative provision would have to

be made as to what should be taught to children of other faiths withdrawn from Christian RE classes.

4.5 Any requirement that the content of what should be taught in RE should be determined centrally would extensively alter the present balance between local determination of content involving Churches in the community, and a central role of the Secretary of State in arbitrating on disputes and complaints without in any way taking a view on content.

4.6 The changes proposed would also be expected to result in increased numbers of pupil withdrawals; some parents send their children to county schools because they do not wish them to have single-faith religious education. In effect the statutory requirement that pupils should undertake religious instruction would apply only to those actively professing Christian faiths. One of the strengths of the present position is that it does enable the majority of children to be exposed to teaching about religious principles and values. The nature of RE provided by schools, including aided schools, has gradually changed since the 1944 Act in line with changing nature of society. Initially the agreed syllabuses concentrated on study of the Bible, reflecting the predominance of Christianity and Judaism. The way in which the subject was taught also reflected a particular view of the "instructional" nature of the subject. Over a period of time both the churches and those concerned with teaching the subject, particularly in county schools, have come to see RE more as a means of exploring the beliefs and values rather than instructing pupils in the tenets of a particular faith. With the development of what is now a multi-faith society there has also been a recognition (again by all the Christian churches) that RE must provide an opportunity to examine and understand faiths other than Christianity. All the more recently drafted agreed syllabuses, which have had to have the agreement of all the established churches and the non-conformist churches, provide for this, both for children in multi-faith schools and where



Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of pupils. This is in line with the stated intentions of the 1944 Act in stressing shared values within society.

4.7 The Government's policy on the place of Christianity within RE and collective worship was put by Lord Arran during the course of a debate on a question from Lady Cox in the House of Lords on 26 February. A copy of the Hansard extract giving Lord Arran's speech is at Annex 4. The content of collective worship was also discussed at the Committee Stage of the Education Reform Bill. Anthony Coombs MP put down amendments calling for separate worship for Christian pupils and pupils of other faiths. A copy of the Minister of State's response is at Annex 5. The amendments were resisted by Mrs Rumbold, emphasising the essential purpose of collective worship being one of unifying the school, not dividing it.

## 5. TACTICS IN DEALING WITH THE LADY COX AMENDMENTS

5.1 It is clear that Lady Cox's amendments would be a considerable embarrassment to the churches and that they would not support them. Nor is it clear that Lady Cox would have cross-bench support. Both Labour and Liberal spokesmen spoke out strongly at Commons committee stage against amendments from Anthony Coombs MP requiring separate acts of worship for different religious groups. It is also known that the proposals would have no support from the Bishops of any of the Churches. This is apparent from recent discussions and from the evidence submitted on the Government's consultative document on collective worship. In the face of their opposition, and the opposition to be expected from Labour and Liberal Peers, it is not clear that her amendments will command great support.

5.2 The Government might therefore

- (a) introduce in Lords Committee state amendments to the Education Reform Bill on lines suggested by the Catholic and Church of England Bishops on Report, (the Bishops' Report stage amendments will need redrafting). This will help to establish the Government's solidarity with the Churches, and ensure their support in opposing the Cox amendments.
- (b) deploy again the arguments put forward on 26 February in the Lords Debate, namely:-
- i. the need for county schools to bring pupils together rather than to divide them;
  - ii. the importance the Government attaches to the 1944 Act arrangements and the veto given to the Church of England on agreed syllabuses;
  - iii. the opportunity provided by the 1944 Act for parents to send their children to denominational schools or to withdraw them from RE and collective worship if they wish.

5.3 In addition to these arguments the Government could need to stress the strengthening provisions for RE contained in the Education Reform Bill, particularly with the addition of the proposed amendments suggested by the Churches. The Government should also stress that an understanding of the Christian faith and values should be passed on to all pupils through RE and collective worship. This is already provided for in relation to RE by virtue of the Church of England veto on agreed syllabuses. In practice, a study of Christianity is provided for by all agreed syllabuses.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN MAINTAINED SCHOOLS:  
THE STATUTORY POSITION

REQUIREMENT TO PROVIDE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. Section 25(2) of the 1944 Education Act requires that religious "instruction" (now more usually referred to as religious education) should be given in every county and voluntary school. For pupils attending county schools Section 26 provides that the RE provided must be in accordance with an agreed syllabus (see para 7 below) and must not "include any catechism or formulary which is distinctive of any particular religious denomination". There is no reference whatsoever in the 1944 Act to RE being entirely or even partly Christian in character.

2. Section 27(6) provides that RE in voluntary controlled schools should be given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, unless parents request that their children receive RE in accordance with the trust deed or the practice followed before the school became controlled. (In practice virtually all controlled schools follow the agreed syllabus for their area).

3. In voluntary aided and special agreement schools Section 28(1) of the Act requires that the religious education provided is determined by the governors in accordance with the trust deed relating to the school, or (where such provision is not made by a trust deed) in accordance with the practice followed before the school became a voluntary school.

PARENTAL RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL

4. Section 25(4) provides parents with a right to withdraw their children from the RE provided in county, controlled, aided or special agreement schools. Section 25(5) provides that in

county and voluntary schools pupils may be withdrawn from the school premises to receive RE elsewhere, so long as the LEA is content that this will not interfere with the attendance of the pupil at school other than at the beginning or end of the school day. Section 26 provides that where parents of children attending a county secondary school wish them to receive RE according to "the tenets of a particular religious denomination", and this cannot be provided outside the school, arrangements "shall" be made by the Authority to allow such education within the school so long as the cost involved will not fall to the Authority and so long as the Authority does not regard it as unreasonable to make such arrangements.

5. Section 28(1) provides that where parents of a child attending an aided or special agreement school wish him or her to receive RE according to the agreed syllabus and the child concerned cannot, with reasonable convenience attend a county or controlled school, the Governors or (if they are unwilling to do so) the LEA "shall" make arrangements for them to receive RE in accordance with the agreed syllabus unless (in the case of the LEA) they are "satisfied that owing to any special circumstances it would be unreasonable to do so".

#### THE AGREED SYLLABUS

6. Sections 26 and 27(6) respectively provide that religious instruction in county and (in normal circumstances) in controlled schools must be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus. The procedure for drawing up or revising the agreed syllabus is set out in the fifth schedule to the 1944 Act. This places responsibility for drawing up the syllabus with the local education authority. When a local education authority wishes to revise its current agreed syllabus it is required by the Fifth Schedule to set up a conference with four committees representing respectively the authority, the teachers, the Church of England (except in Wales or Monmouthshire) and such other religious

denominations as the authority, having regard to the circumstances of the area, considers ought to be represented. Each committee within the conference must agree to the new syllabus (thus giving, for example, the Church of England committee a power of veto).

#### POWERS OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

7. The central feature of the agreed syllabus mechanism is that it provides for local determination of the scope and character of religious instruction in schools. The fifth schedule to the Act provides that the Secretary of State has a role, only where an agreed syllabus conference has failed to reach unanimous agreement or where an Authority has failed to adopt a syllabus unanimously recommended to them by a conference. In such circumstances the Secretary of State is required to appoint a body of persons to prepare a syllabus of religious education for the area. It is a requirement of the schedule that the body in question shall be of similar constitution to the agreed syllabus conference, in including representation from the LEA, teachers, the Church of England and other religious denominations for the area. Once appointed the body is entirely responsible for determining the content of the syllabus for RE. The Secretary of State has no further role to play. Ministers have no power to involve themselves in the process of defining the content of agreed syllabuses.

8. Where the Secretary of State is satisfied that a school is not fulfilling its statutory requirement to provide religious instruction, and where he is satisfied that it is expedient to do so, he can issue appropriate directions to the LEA or the governing body, as the case may be, under Section 99 of the 1944 Act. A complaint about the provision of religious instruction might also be considered under Section 68 of the 1944 Act.

#### COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

9. Section 25 of the 1944 Act requires that the school day in every county and every voluntary school shall begin with a single act of worship on the part of all pupils in the school. The only exceptions to the rule are where parents ask for their children to be withdrawn or where the accommodation at the school makes a single act of worship impracticable. The only requirement in the Act relating to the content of worship is that contained in Section 26 which states that worship in county schools shall not be "distinctive of any particular religious denomination".

ANNEX 2

STATEMENTS BY GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN DURING DEBATE ON THE 1944  
EDUCATION ACT CONCERNING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE  
WORSHIP

1. MR BUTLER (SECOND READING, VOL 396, COL231) ON THE NEED FOR  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONCERNING CHRISTIANITY

"Let us hope that our children - to use the words of one agreed  
syllabus -

"may gain knowledge of the common Christian faith  
held by their fathers for nearly 2000 years; may  
seek for themselves in Christianity principles  
which give a purpose to life and a guide to all  
its problems."

2. SIMILARLY, MR EDE ( COMMITTEE STAGE, VOL 397, COL 2425)

" There is I think, a general recognition that even if parents  
themselves have in the course of life encountered difficulties  
that have led them into doubts and into hesitations, they do  
desire that their children shall have a grounding in the  
principles of the Christian faith as it ought to be practiced in  
this country."

3. MR EDE (COMMITTEE STAGE, VOL 397, COLS 2419 & 2426) ON THE  
NEED FOR RE AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP TO BE A UNIFYING INFLUENCE  
WITHIN SCHOOLS

"You cannot, every morning, have some children absenting  
themselves from the collective act of worship in order that they  
may attend a service in a church or some other building. We have  
been appealed to by the religious leaders to arrange this  
collective act of worship, so that the day will start with the  
whole school in unison making its approach to the tasks of the  
day. I cannot help thinking that it would be very undesirable to  
make provision whereby that collective act could really break out  
into a series of acts in separate places of worship...."

"In fact there really is among the worshipping communities in the  
country a very wide measure of agreement that this is something  
special but does not represent the things on which, fortunately,  
we can unite. I hope we shall postpone as long as possible the  
introduction to the child mind the things on which we  
unfortunately differ."

# Mr. Butler and the Community Annex

Continued from page 1

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of the Board of Deputies had the Government's encouragement and good wishes.

Never, he went on, had there been such a time in the history of the Jews, never such a diaspora and never such suffering in their history. Therefore, it was more than ever important that they should concentrate their energies on bringing up their children and young people in the tradition of Judaism.

While the minds and policies of Jewry, he continued, might be agitated by a desire to find a permanent home, he hoped they would always have their own schools an abiding shelter for their young people and that they could at least be made to feel at home in the spirit.

In the educational problems with which he had been dealing over the past two years, he had set great store by the opportunity of personal talks and the exchange of letters with the Chief Rabbi, and at the Board of Education had profited by discussions with representatives of the Joint Emergency Committee for Jewish Religious Education. In future, he continued, some non-provided schools were to be called "controlled" and some "aided." In the controlled schools religious instruction would be in accordance with an agreed syllabus. But denominational, or special, teaching would be available for not more than two periods a week where desired. It might be that some of their schools would desire to opt for this alternative. Under it the cost was to be borne by public funds. Or they might decide to become aided schools, and under it independence was secured. They would then receive a 50 per cent grant from the Exchequer for improvements.

Mr. Butler referred to the fact that the withdrawal provisions and in general the scheme as a whole would for the first time be applicable to secondary schools, and he was particularly interested in the reference to this matter which was made in Dr. Nathan Morris's pamphlet. The Emergency Committee booklet expressed the hope that the Hebrew classes would derive some benefit from the new educational reforms. He mentioned these Hebrew classes to show that their own special forms of teaching would receive encouragement.

## The "Agreed Syllabus"

They would have noticed the special provision in agreed syllabus teaching. There was every reason why Jewish representatives should be called to the framing of this syllabus under schedule 6 of the Bill. The fact that the syllabus would be worked out by a group of people belonging to various persuasions would mean that any marked bias peculiar to one denomination would be prevented. That was why he liked to describe these syllabuses as "interdenominational" and not "undenominational." The Bill expressly provided for different syllabuses for day schools or classes. There was no reason, therefore, to anticipate that syllabus instruction would be imparted which was unsuitable or insufficient, whether one viewed the matter from the Jewish or Christian standpoint.

After noting and welcoming the determination of the Jewish community to take advantage of the new reform, and the self-sacrifice indicated by the proposal for communal taxation, Mr. Butler said the aim of British education, after all, was to elevate into a permanent status and lasting sphere those values which all of them were now fighting to defend and they in the Government were confident of the support of their community which had suffered so much from intolerance, prejudice, and rank brutality.

The success which the Jewish community might make in establishing their youth in the way of their forefathers would be a factor, he was sure, in raising the standards of their country as a whole. Their common task together was, he believed, moral rather than intellectual. Man's relationship to God was a determining factor in moral behaviour. He, therefore, felt that the position given to religious instruction in the Bill was a move in the right direction and that with the help and the influence of the parents, the teachers, and the community, the

all of the home—which was a more homely way of putting it—they might help to keep alive the flickering candle of individualism—which was all it was in Europe just now—so that gradually the candle-power increased and they would have a great light.

MR. CHUTER EDE, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, said the school was a very possessive place, but it could not exclusively possess the child, and the work in it was very largely conditioned by the environment in which the child lived outside. He, therefore, welcomed the great interest which was taken by the Jewish parent in the educational life of his child. The old injunction that stones should be erected so that the child should ask, "what mean ye by these stones?" was still carried out, he knew, in every devout Jewish home, and there must be between every school and the home and the locality a wise, co-operative influence if the best was to be done for the child, especially in the light of the new duty that had been placed on the parent.

In proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Butler and Mr. Chuter Ede, the CHIEF RABBI said he expressed the gratitude of the community to the illustrious architect of the new educational ideal now before the country. No one had brought forward as bold and broad a Parliamentary measure as he had done, with the intent of rendering the knowledge and the power derived from it available to every child and adolescent in the land.

In another direction, Mr. Butler's plan was still more warmly to be welcomed. It was to-day generally agreed that the vital element in human education is religion; and that the man or woman who remains unaware of the Divine, and devoid of the fear of God, has fallen asleep in life. But Mr. Butler clearly saw that if religion, the greatest of agencies for shaping character to worthy ends, was to be implemented for this lofty purpose, religious knowledge must frankly be given high place in the school curriculum. And he had made every preparation to do so.

When all this became law and educational fact, it would lead to a wonderful diffusion of education, and marked increase of religious knowledge. This was a consummation devoutly to be welcomed; and they would be pleased to be reminded that it was not quite so modern, or modernist, as some might think. Few seemed to be aware of the fact that, in Israel, religious knowledge and learning were never the exclusive prerogative or possession of any one class, but were the inalienable "heritage of the congregation of Jacob."

Dr. Israel Feldman seconded the vote of thanks.

their position.

## THE EDUCATION BILL

14/11/1944 J.

MR. BUTLER'S task in piloting his Education Bill safe port is plainly beset by many difficulties. Undaunted by however, he has gone from one denomination to another sought their co-operation, and last Monday this explanation took him to Woburn House, where he gathered of the Jewish Community and presented to all his customary skill and charm, his case for Jewish support of his Bill. Anglo-Jewry will, we believe, find nothing but sympathy alike for his sincerity and his very gallant purpose. We are glad to say that it is plain that, as he himself admitted, he has been helped, in no small measure, so Jewish interests are concerned, by the efforts of the Chief Rabbi and the Joint Emergency Committee. Only optimism would perhaps anticipate for any Minister of Education a hundred per cent acquiescence in such proposals: difficulties in the way are very real and intractable, and especially in the matter of finance—for Jews as well as for Jews. But a very great deal depends on the spirit in which Mr. Butler's historic scheme is approached. One of the basic principles of the Bill is its clear-cut recognition of the place of religion in education. That is surely something for which we are deeply thankful for in these times and should, if anything, ensure for the plan at least wide goodwill and an earnest desire to be helpful rather than obstructive, no less than a readiness for reasonable sacrifices in giving to it practical effect. All those who jib, and certainly not without cause, at

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circumstances religious education is seen as an educationally valid component of the school curriculum, subject to the same disciplines as any other area of study. It is thus directed towards developing a critical understanding of the religious and moral dimensions of human experience and away from attempting to foster the claims of particular religious standpoints".

A comparative study of Church and county schools entitled *Faith, Culture and the Dual System*, by Bernadine O'Keefe, in 1986 has a very interesting chapter on RE. What it shows is a vast diversity in the amount, methods and aims of the schools in the survey. There is diversity even within Church schools. Some teachers were concerned to promote a religious response, but the comments of other teachers show that while their aim is still pupil-centred, the personal beliefs of the pupils are not the teachers' concern. One said—I quote—

"The main aim is to understand the significance that religion can make to human life and experience. How religion can affect the whole of someone's life. I am not trying to turn out good Anglicans, but to show them that a religious outlook on life is still a viable option in the 20th century. I want them to think about ultimate questions".

The report comments:

"These replies support much of the current thinking on religious education, which sees the main aims of exploring the nature of religion in terms of beliefs, practices and interpretation, rather than one of establishing or even nurturing faith".

In a non-Church school, that seems a reasonable aim to pursue. Another teacher said:

"The main aim is to acquire a reasonable knowledge about world religions, including Christianity".

These extracts focus attention on RE and the impact it can have in playing an important role in bringing about changes in attitudes, countering misunderstanding and challenging prejudices and stereotypes. It is very wise, in my view, not to demand Christian religious instruction in a society such as ours at the end of the 20th century. A greater understanding of other people's beliefs and way of life is essential for harmony in society. What I would plead for is a wide discretion to be given to LEAs and heads, and not for central direction. I was glad to see in an article written by Mr. Baker in *The Times* on 1st February these words:

"I want to hold to the principle established in the 1944 Act that the nature and content of RE should be locally determined. I am against central prescription in this sensitive area".

I hope he holds to that: flexibility is essential. It is there now and should not be discouraged. If parents want specifically Christian religious education, most have the opportunity to choose a Church school for their children. The Schools Council's view was that the tradition of our national life has been largely shaped and sustained by behaviour and ideas closely associated with the practice of religion, and particularly of Christian religion. Since education involves a thorough exploration of the environment and the received culture, this source of our national heritage should be studied and appreciated. An investigation of religion and its claims is thus an important part of our education in Britain, whether the pupils have any religious affiliation or not. I would add that they should have a knowledge of the Bible and also of the faiths and cultures of other races who now form part of our very diverse society.

That society presents challenges for all schools, many RE teachers have not yet equipped themselves fully to cope with the change. There are many implications for the training of our teachers and for

in-service training. This is something that the Swann report stresses, and I hope that when the Minister replies he will have something to say on this last point.

3.34 p.m.

**The Earl of Arran:** My Lords, the Government welcome this opportunity to debate an important subject and are grateful to my noble friend Lady Cox for raising it for discussion. The serious contributions made by your Lordships have served to emphasise the importance with which we regard this matter.

Many countries find it impossible to contemplate providing for either religious education or worship in schools, regarding such matters as separate from the education process and more the preserve of the family and the Churches. That schools in this country have successfully provided religious education and worship for many years is, I think, a testimony not only to the success of the 1944 Education Act but also to the tolerance and understanding of the British people in overcoming the barriers of different faiths and denominations.

The Government have consistently made clear the importance they attach to both religious education and to worship in our schools. Both are required by statute. I have to say to the noble Lord, Lord Houghton, that we have no intention of changing this. The response from parents and others to the national curriculum proposals demonstrates continued support for the subject. My noble friend Lady Blatch also mentioned recent evidence of eight out of 10 parents supporting the place of religious education in our schools.

Clauses 6 and 15 of the Education Reform Bill will serve to strengthen the existing requirement for religious education in schools making clear the duty to provide instruction and establishing a complaints procedure to ensure that the law is upheld. Clause 79 of the Bill, while giving schools greater flexibility in mounting collective worship, at the same time reaffirms the requirement for daily worship in all maintained schools for all pupils unless withdrawn by their parents.

I shall come in a moment to the central theme of this debate: that is, the place of Christianity within religious education and worship in schools. But first I should like to say a little more about religious education in relation to the Government's proposals for a national curriculum.

There are very good reasons why religious education should not be a foundation subject in the terms proposed for legislation on the national curriculum. That was one of the points raised by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro. At present, what religious education is given in schools is determined locally. This local discretion would be threatened if religious education were a foundation subject, as would the present right of parents to withdraw their children from the subject. It could mean that the content of religious education in Church of England, Roman Catholic, and Jewish voluntary schools would be taken away from governors and instead determined centrally and prescribed in tablets of stone. I would therefore agree with the noble Lord, Lord Thurlow, on the undesirability of this.

[THE EARL OF ARRAN.]

It is suggested by some that religious education could be a special case retaining the local discretion and right of withdrawal while still calling itself a foundation subject. This would be the worst of all worlds: a foundation subject without an automatic requirement to teach it to all pupils. It is far better surely to rely on the existing provisions of the 1944 Act, suitably strengthened by the provisions of the Education Reform Bill. I can assure your Lordships that, despite what many appear to believe, the Government's decision not to include religious education within the national curriculum is intended to protect the subject rather than devalue it.

In moving to the main purpose of the debate, I should like first to comment on the place of Christianity within religious education. Those responsible for drafting the 1944 Act would certainly have envisaged that the religious education in our schools would be predominantly Christian in character. However, nowhere in the Act is there any requirement that religious education should be Christian. The Act simply requires that religious education should be provided in all county and voluntary schools; that in county schools it should be non-denominational; and that it should be given in accordance with the agreed syllabus.

Ever since the Act came into force there have been debates similar to ours today on the meaning of the 1944 religious education provisions. This continuing debate has both witnessed and contributed to a change in the way religious education is perceived in its aims and the way it is taught and in the content of the subject. Initially, the agreed syllabuses concentrated on study of the Bible, reflecting not only the predominance of Christianity and Judaism but also a particular view of the "instructional" nature of the subject to be taught in schools.

Over a period of time both the Churches and those directly concerned with teaching religious education, particularly in county schools, have come to see the subject more as a means of exploring beliefs and values rather than that of instructing pupils in the tenets of a particular faith. Furthermore, with the gradual development of what is now a multi-faith society there has been a growing recognition that religious education must provide an opportunity to examine and understand faiths other than Christianity.

However, we should not exaggerate the shift of emphasis that has occurred in religious education. Evidence from Her Majesty's Inspectors shows very clearly that, generally, Christianity is still at the core of religious education in our schools. The central place of Christianity is ensured by the agreed syllabus procedure, which automatically involves the Church of England in the preparation of agreed syllabuses and gives the established Church the right of veto. But the Church of England and the other churches have quite rightly recognised the important part religious education must play in establishing greater understanding and cohesion within society.

The question raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, is to ask what steps the Government are taking to ensure that all state schools provide a Christian religious education for all children whose parents

request it. As I have already pointed out, contrary to the overall impression given by my noble friend Lady Cox, the evidence available shows that a study of Christianity remains central to the religious education provided in all our schools. The Government accept that there are some parents who would wish their children to have exclusively Christian religious education. Such preference is already provided for by the 1944 Act partly by the right of parental withdrawal, but also by the option available to parents to send their children to aided denominational schools.

It can of course be argued that not all parents have access to aided schools where they can be guaranteed religious education wholly in accordance with a particular faith. But where they do not, there is no reason why pupils withdrawn from religious education in maintained schools should not receive tuition in accordance with their parental preference. The 1944 Act specifically provides for such circumstances, and allows alternative religious instruction to be given during school hours either on the school premises or elsewhere. There should be no question therefore of children being obliged either to participate in religious education with which their parents do not agree, or to receive no religious education at all.

As the noble Baroness and the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, have said, there have been a number of instances in recent years of local communities opening independent schools where there is a particular religious emphasis. This is not an exclusively Christian phenomenon and there are also Jewish and Moslem schools on the Register of Independent Schools. In answer to the noble Lord, Lord Hampton, I understand that there are schools catering for almost all philosophies and faiths, as well as some which pursue an entirely secular curriculum.

I am afraid however that there is no possibility of the Government providing financial assistance to independent schools in the way that the noble Baroness would clearly like. Were we to do so, the very independence which is enjoyed by such schools would inevitably be eroded. The taxpayer would rightly expect controls to be imposed on how his money was being spent and there would be constraints which independent schools would find unacceptable.

My noble friend Lady Cox has also raised the question of the provision of Christian worship in schools. I have already mentioned Clause 79 of the Education Reform Bill. I can answer the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro by saying that this preserves the requirement for daily collective worship in all maintained schools.

The content of worship is I think more problematical than the content of religious education. There is no statutory procedure for collective worship analogous to the agreed syllabus procedure for religious education. Furthermore, the 1944 Act is entirely silent on the form collective worship should take, other than the requirement that for county schools, worship should be non-denominational in character. There is certainly no requirement in the 1944 provisions that worship should be Christian, although in practice the

Christian tradition has been and still is at the core of the worship provided in most maintained schools. It is therefore for the schools themselves to determine content, although it is clear that what is provided must be a genuine act of worship and not just a secular assembly merely providing a means for school announcements and serving an entirely administrative purpose.

I suggest that a debate on the precise meaning of worship would occupy your Lordships for many hours, without reaching any clear conclusions, with respect to my noble friend Lord Cork and Orrery. In many schools, particularly those where Christianity is the accepted religion of the vast majority of pupils, worship should, we believe, be seen in the terms described in the Newson Report. The report argued:

"Corporate worship is not to be thought of as an instrument of education—though it is that—but as a time in which pupils and teachers seek help in prayer, express awe and gratitude and joy, and pause to recollect the presence of God".

Clearly the mounting of worship for pupils of different faiths is a more difficult matter, requiring great sensitivity by the teaching staff. However, many schools have found ways appropriate to the setting to hold acts of worship which celebrate and reflect shared values, common to all communities. To some extent the lack of prescription in the Education Acts has allowed collective worship to develop to take account of the changing nature of society. In the Government's view, this change is inevitable if collective worship is to retain one of its prime purposes, that of an occasion which brings pupils together in collective contemplation of matters spiritual.

This was spelt out very clearly in a number of responses to last year's consultation exercise. For example, the response from the Christian Education Movement stated:

"It is important that any worship by sections of the school enshrines the principles of present collective worship and does not separate pupils by Christian denomination or by faith. Where there is a wide range of faith communities represented among pupils worship must acknowledge this plurality".

This I think serves to emphasise what the Government see as the unifying purpose of worship in schools. We would not wish to see a situation where children in maintained schools are divided into separate acts of worship for different religious groups. This would in the Government's view run contrary to the aims of collective worship that I have already described.

The question raised by my noble friend Lady Cox is to ask what the Government are doing to ensure that all state schools provide a Christian act of worship for parents who request it. As with religious education, so it is with collective worship. For parents who specifically want their children to participate in an entirely Christian act of worship, without any reference to other faiths, the option exists to send their children to denominational voluntary schools. If such schools are not conveniently available, parents have the option to withdraw their children from collective worship and schools may allow parents to organise separate acts of worship on the school premises should they so wish, be they Christian, Moslem or Jew. I sincerely hope, however, that most parents would recognise the value of a truly collective act of worship in schools, which while not necessarily exclusively

Christian is nevertheless a meaningful act with spiritual content. Such spiritual content might help to lessen the anxieties of the noble Earl, Lord Halsbury, concerning the decline in moral standards.

I hope that what I have had to say provides your Lordships with reassurance that the Government fully support the place of both religious education and collective worship in maintained schools and that practice in the vast majority of schools still reflects the dominant place of the Christian faith within our society. In the Government's view, it is of the utmost importance that all children, whatever their ethnic and religious background, should be introduced at school to those Christian beliefs and values which permeate our traditions and culture. I hope that reassures my noble friends Lord Swinfen, Lady Macleod and Lady Strange. It is entirely appropriate for Christian and other clergy to be involved in religious education and collective worship in schools.

The Government also believe that religious education in maintained schools should provide all children with some understanding of faiths other than their own. Similarly, where there are pupils of more than one religious background, schools should devise forms of collective worship which have meaning for all pupils.

I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady David, that we must recognise the nature of the society in which we now live. We are no longer a predominantly Christian nation and our schools reflect the multi-faith nature of Britain in 1988.

**The Earl of Longford:** My Lords, the noble Earl said that we are no longer predominantly a Christian nation. There may be a sense in which that is true although I hope it is not, but so far as the other faiths are concerned, the proportion in this country is still very small.

**The Earl of Arran:** My Lords, I accept and understand the point the noble Lord makes.

The part played by schools in ensuring religious tolerance and understanding is an important one and is successfully achieved in many maintained schools through religious education and collective worship. At the same time we must continue to take account, so far as possible, of strongly held religious convictions, allowing parents a clear choice. The Government believe that the present statutory provisions concerning religious education and worship preserve that choice. We also believe that the enforcement provisions contained in the Education Reform Bill will in turn ensure that the law is properly enforced and that all children are able to benefit from religious education and collective worship in our schools.

### Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Bill

Returned from the Commons to enable corrections to be made to certain amendments; the amendments accordingly were corrected, and the Bill returned to the Commons.

House adjourned at ten minutes before four o'clock.

[Mr. Key]

He said:

"They must have an awareness of other religions, but appropriate to their age. That does not mean to say that you give them systematic courses of whatever religions are in the area, but you certainly cannot cloak over the fact that there are these people, they worship in this way. However, it will come in in the right level in the ordinary teaching. Secondly, they are only going to be capable of making a right decision as the days go on, if they have been properly instructed in the right sense of that word, in their own faith, and are actually living that. That is a necessary basis; it applies to all other aspects of life. You cannot float about picking and choosing all the time; your ability to judge depends on your commitment to certain things. This is why I would say that our primary concern must be to see that they are helped to learn, to understand and to practise their own faith. At the same time there should be an awareness of the situation in the community around. However, the time for a positive decision by them will arrive later. That is my judgment".

Much of what is contained in the Bill, and here I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, incorporates the recommendations of the Select Committee report. The report states that although the schools and the LEAs should recognise

"the diversity of faiths of parents of primary children, England remains predominantly a Christian country and many who are not necessarily practising Christians nevertheless support Christian ideals. Schemes of work in county schools should reflect the predominance of the Christian faith and an appreciation of the diversity of faiths now current in England, and should abide by the statutory duty for religious instruction placed upon schools by the Education Act, 1944."

That is why my hon. Friend is right to have pressed the Government to explain exactly where they stand on this issue and why we must appreciate the difference between a school assembly and an act of worship.

**Ms Armstrong:** The hon. Gentleman's speech was interesting. While encouraging us to differentiate between acts of worship, school assembly and instruction he confused them. He read extracts from the Select Committee minutes and report about instruction and religious education and tried to draw parallels with collective worship. I am saddened by the debate. Some Conservative Members have been contentedly cushioned from the many endeavours within the Christian Church to ensure that it responds to our multicultural society. It must do that not from a colonialist position and not by stating that Christianity is the main faith of this country. Christianity shares this world with many other faiths and if Christians want to express dominance they do so out of anxiety about the strength of their conviction. If the strength of their conviction means anything, there is no need to say, "We are dominant and you must first worship in our way and then in your way".

**Mr. Key:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms. Armstrong:** No, I will not. I did not interrupt the hon. Gentleman. No other interpretation can be put on the amendments. A long time ago I worked in a country that had recently gained its independence from colonialism. A missionary school was taken over by the new independent government and we taught Moslem, non-Christian and Christian girls. I conducted and developed with those girls different

acts of worship by drawing on their different backgrounds.

I completely refute any suggestion that those girls lacked conviction or spirituality, or any of those things that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) claimed. They gained because they drew on the convictions and experiences of many faiths. We were able, in one act of worship, to reflect the interests and concerns of a multiple of cultures in a school that had originally been a white missionary Christian school. That was important.

I have since been involved in many exciting experiences with young people to explore acts of collective worship that recognise the multicultural nature of our society. I am sorry that Conservative Members have not been able to participate in such experiences.

**Mr. Key:** The hon. Lady is trying to drive us into a corner that does not exist. She is wrongly attributing to us many unattractive properties.

For many years I too taught religious education in school. I spent a long time working with the Methodist Missionary Society in their schools in Africa, especially in Tegwani school near Bulawayo. I do not write off other religions as the hon. Lady suggests, and I do not say that the Christian religion is the dominant religion. It is crucial to people of any faith that they believe their faith to be the right faith. If they do not, they may as well not have the faith. But that does not mean that we cannot share our faith with someone else. That is what the amendment deals with.

However, we have a duty to explain why we believe that the Christian culture which has sustained this nation for 2000 years should still be the lead culture.

**Ms. Armstrong:** I used the word "dominant" and the hon. Gentleman uses the word "lead". I ask hon. Members to decide the difference in terminology. He drove himself into a corner; he did not need me to do it for him.

We should share our religious convictions without saying that ours is the lead religion or is better. We should work out together how we can practice our religions collectively. I did not teach religious education.

The hon. Members are frightened to accept what is happening in our society. They want to return to a situation that they find comfortable and reassuring. But we live in a multicultural society and in some schools Christianity is not the lead religion. Rab Butler wrote a book called "The World Changes". The world has changed. Britain has changed and schools have changed since 1944. The amendment refuses to accept that change and therefore, we refuse to accept the amendment.

**Mrs. Rumbold:** I know that other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate but I think that I should intervene now to put on the record our response to my hon. Friend's amendments. When he introduced the amendments he said that they were

proposing amendments. We have consulted widely about collective worship in schools and the wording of the clause is a result of that consultation. The hon. Gentleman suggests that we should insert something that materially affects the clause.

The debate has centred on collective worship and the difference between an act of collective worship and an assembly. However, much of the value of collective worship lies in the fact that it is collective and involves all the pupils, with the exception of pupils whose parents ask for them to be withdrawn. The 1944 Act did not stipulate that collective worship should be Christian. The Act has to be interpreted at face value and not according to what was said in the Standing Committee. It may be that in 1944 the situation in schools today was not envisaged. We live in today's world and we must take account of what happens in today's world, especially what happens in county schools. I sincerely believe that the act of worship should be provided on a non-denominational basis, possibly reflecting the Christian background, as many schools' acts of worship do now. However, it is important to remember that the 1944 Act does not require that act of worship to be Christian.

I should like to read to the Committee a paragraph of the response from the Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth. It encapsulates the strong feelings that many hon. Members have expressed about what they sense to be the value of the act of worship. It says:

"Worship encourages the development of a sense of wonder and gives pupils opportunities to ask questions about their origins and their destinations. Celebration is concerned with those common values which form the basis of the school and exploration implies a positive provision of information and experience to enable pupils to have a basis on which to make moral and or religious judgments. All assemblies should be underpinned by an awareness of the presence of God and the realisation that different people worship in different ways. Account should be taken of the foundation and composition of the school and there should be care to ensure that assemblies are thoughtfully planned and make as much use as possible of the richness and diversity which is common to the best practices of teaching and learning."

That is immensely important to our concept of what should happen in acts of collective worship in today's schools.

I understand my hon. Friend's fears about the basis of the Christian religion in this country. Parents with strong beliefs opt for many voluntary-aided Church of England and Catholic schools for their children, but for children who attend non-denominational county schools the paragraph that I quoted encapsulates a sensible and worthwhile basis on which to settle our arguments on the way in which collective worship is delivered in our schools. It is crucial that there should be an act of collective worship. It sets a standard and gives a sense of belonging to a school. To go as far as my hon. Friend suggested and insert the word "Christian" would debase that concept.

11.30 pm

On my hon. Friend's second amendment, I am worried that he suggests that there should be the right to withdraw and have separate acts of worship. There will be many opportunities for people to come to the

school and describe different types of religion and belief, but that falls into a different category from that of worship. It is education about religion—so that there is a greater understanding between people about how others worship and what they believe. That is satisfactory, but it would not be right to encapsulate in the clause an ability for separate acts of worship to be held in schools. That could lead to a distinctive and segregational attitude to acts of worship. It would be divisive to the sense of purpose of a collective act that makes up such a fundamental part of school life.

I believe strongly in the importance of ethos, of a school's belonging and in the act of worship making a commitment to the school. To put it into a denominational setting and expect that that would unite a school slightly misses the point.

I feel as passionately about the matter as many members of the Committee and I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest to consider withdrawing his amendment.

**Mr. Ashdown:** I do not believe that any member of the Committee could have put the case better than the Minister of State has done. I endorse every word that she said. The hon. Lady's quotation from the response of the Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth was very moving.

I shall not use the overheated rhetoric that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) has heard from other Opposition Members. I do not believe that he is sectarian or that he is attempting to be racist in any sense.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that he was firm in his faith. Let him be so; he is fortunate. I cannot be firm in mine, because my faith was broken by clauses very similar to this. As a boy in Northern Ireland from a mixed Catholic and Protestant family I found that people felt it necessary to force down my throat what was the prevailing religion in Ireland for reasons similar to this. That caused me to see the Church as the instrument of hate in Ireland. I know that that is not so, but I regard the sentiment—not that of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest—as corrupted. It is used as an instrument for discrimination, bullying and for institutional terrorism.

I expect that Northern Ireland is a special circumstance, but some ingredients in society, such as racism, would use and corrupt those institutions and this emotion to produce the opposite effect to that intended. Richness and diversity, as mentioned in the Methodist quotation, are important facets of our society. The pluralism that now exists and which has, God knows, taken enough turbulent and bloody years to achieve, is an essential jewel in the nature of our society. It is also an essential ingredient for our stability. The Government's wording encompasses that, but I do not wish to undermine what the hon. Member for Wyre Forest said. I endorse what the Minister said and hope that the hon. Gentleman will not press the amendment.

EDUCATION: General Policy  
Pt 17

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Professor Griffiths

EDUCATION REFORM BILL: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

Mr. Baker's minute at Flag A responds to your request for advice on the amendments to the Bill which we understand Lady Cox intends to table. We understand that Lady Cox intends that the requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship should be modified to require a daily act of christian collective worship; and that the requirement that religious instruction shall be provided should be amended to require that religious instruction in the christian faith should be provided. Lady Cox and Michael Alison are coming to see you to discuss the issue on Tuesday 29 March. The meeting is foreshadowed in the report in today's Times at Flag B.

Mr. Baker's minute raises two broad issues:

- (i) the acceptability of the outcome of Mr. Baker's negotiations with the Christian Churches about the Bill; and
- (ii) tactics regarding Lady Cox's amendments.

An early view is necessary on (i); Cardinal Hume and the Bishop of London have arranged to have tabled on Wednesday 23 March amendments setting out their understanding of the outcome of their negotiations with Mr. Baker. There is more time for (ii); the Bill has yet to reach the Lords.

Mr. Baker reports in paragraph 3 i-iii of his minute his agreement with the Churches. He argues that the Churches will oppose Lady Cox's approach and he explains why in Section 4 of the note attached to his paper and proposes some tactics in Section 5 for dealing with (i.e. thwarting) Lady Cox's amendments.

The issues at (i) and (ii) above are obviously linked. But I do not see that Mr. Baker can do otherwise than welcome in principle at the Bill's Report Stage the outcome of the discussions reached with the Cardinal and the Bishop. Decisions on tactics in the Lords should, however, await further elucidation of the details of Lady Cox's approach. Brian Griffiths is trying to discover more from Michael Alison and your meeting with Lady Cox will be helpful here. Mr. Baker should also be in early touch with Lady Cox to discuss her intentions with her and to sound her out on the points described in Section 4 of the note attached to his minute.

Agree to proceed in this way?

N.L.W.

N. L. WICKS

21 March 1988

LobAR2



# Senior Tories call for emphasis on a Christian education

By Robin Oakley, Political Editor

Mrs Margaret Thatcher is to be urged this week to press Mr Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education and Science, to insist that children in Britain's schools should receive not just religious education but "Christian" education.

Mr Michael Alison, who used to be Mrs Thatcher's Parliamentary Private Secretary and Lady Cox, an influential voice in Conservative education circles, are to see the Prime Minister, who is believed to have sympathy for their views.

They are to plead that the Government should specify the Christian religion as the dominant component of religious education - a move which would cause controversy in schools and areas where other faiths predominate among pupils.

They want an amendment to the Education Reform Bill now before Parliament.

Mr Alison and Lady Cox will claim poll evidence that 85 per cent of Britain's population considers itself Christian whereas Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and other faiths claim only about 3 per cent of the population as adherents.

They argue that the Education Act, 1944, which made religious instruction in schools compulsory, clearly intended that to be instruction in the Christian religion but that it was so self-evident at that time that the word was not used.

The Education Reform Bill continues to make religious education compulsory. It provides a complaints procedure to uphold that obligation and the broad school curriculum is specifically required to pro-

Head teachers will be forced by the Government's education reform plans to become marketing executives in a "scramble" for pupils, their leader claimed yesterday.

Mr David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, told a union conference in Cambridge that the Education Reform Bill would create cut-throat competition with schools using glossy brochures and video films to attract pupils.

note the "spiritual, moral and cultural" development of pupils.

In the House of Lords last month Lord Arran, speaking for the Government, ruled out the idea of specifying Christianity as the main component on the grounds that Britain had become a multi-faith society.

In an unreported speech in his Selby constituency last week Mr Alison, who as Second Church Estates Commissioner, is a special link between the Commons and the Church of England, denied that Britain was a multi-faith society.

He insisted that while courtesy and respect must be accorded to other religions "as the dominant traditional religion of the British people, no real appreciation of our culture or history is possible without some proper understanding of Christianity".

Ethnic minorities, he said, were not to be equated with "other faiths". Britain's black population was one of the fastest growing areas for the Christian church.

Mr Alison and Lady Cox,

heading a powerful Christian lobby, wished to combat what Mr Alison calls the "education heresy, almost a conspiracy" of the multi-faith syllabus.

Children are being damaged, he says, by syllabuses which include the discussion of rituals such as human sacrifice and encouragement to find out what happens in a seance.

Mr Alison said: "More sinisterly, some multi-faith RE syllabuses are so worded as to allow inclusion of secular and political creeds such as humanism and the militant atheism of Marxist ideology.

"The marginalizing, even the exclusion, of Christian teaching is the deliberate aim and policy of some left-wing education authorities in urban areas."

Lady Cox has alleged in the Lords that parents who want and request Christian worship and Christian-based religious education for their children are being denied them.

She complains of the "dilution of Christian teaching in a multi-faith mish-mash" and of its secularization by concentration of social and political issues.

"Preoccupation with the occult and with phenomena such as witchcraft is a recurring theme in many RE courses."

Education ministers say that they see religious education and compulsory school worship as important.

However, they resist the call for a Christian emphasis and are ruling out making religious education a foundation subject for the national curriculum on the grounds that local discretion would be threatened, as would the right of parents to withdraw their children from the subject.

CCB/UP



The Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
London SW1.

March 1 1988.

Dear Prime Minister,

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND WORSHIP IN SCHOOLS.

I am writing to express my concern over the Government's present position on these issues. Last Friday, I initiated a debate in the House of Lords (selected passages from Hansard enclosed). In my opening speech I offered evidence which I and many other Christians find deeply disturbing. Other speakers endorsed my concerns.

However, the Government's position caused considerable dismay to many people, in the House and beyond, who wish to see Christian worship and Christian religious education preserved in state schools. For example:

1. The Government claimed "the evidence available shows that a study of Christianity remains central to the religious education provided in all our schools." It is precisely because evidence does NOT show this that I initiated the Debate.

2. The Government is emphasising that the 1944 Act did not specify that school acts of worship should be Christian - although, as I showed by quoting from the debates at that time, this was clearly the intention. Thus the Government is now endorsing the replacement of Christian-based worship by a potentially secularised and politicised mish-mash - a development already occurring in many schools.

3. The Government made the astonishing statement that "We are no longer a predominantly Christian nation and our schools must reflect the multi-faith nature of Britain in 1988." This is in direct contradiction to evidence given earlier that the overwhelming majority of people in Britain (80%) claim to be Christian; only 7% adhere to other faiths - and many of these still prefer their children to have a Christian-based education rather than a relativistic multi-faith syncretism.

I believe the situation is desperately serious and that it is urgent that the Government shows itself in support of a predominantly Christian-based worship and religious education. I would like to work for this when the Education Bill comes to the Lords; I believe there will be widespread support from many quarters.

But I am worried that the Government may commit itself further to an incompatible position and have to oppose us. May I therefore come to see you, briefly, to explain what I hope to do and why I believe it is vitally important for the preservation of our spiritual heritage that the Government does not continue in its present position? I know that sometimes it is difficult for you to obtain grass-roots evidence. I would thus be grateful if I might bring two teachers from Newcastle who have done a great deal of work in this area. One is a Head of a comprehensive school and was a long-standing socialist who has moved politically because of his concern over these issues. I believe that you would find it a tonic to meet them! Perhaps in a very different context, they represent a similar commitment and courage to those brave Russian dissidents who signed the last letter I wrote to you!

Yours sincerely,  
Carrie Cox.