

R13/4



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

13th April 1988

The Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

Prime Minister

Unless you think  
otherwise, I do not  
believe this calls for a  
reply other than a simple act.  
Agree? N.U.J. 13.4.

Dear Margaret,

We write to say how grateful we are to you for giving so much of your time yesterday to listening, and responding so constructively, to our representations about the Christian content of religious education.

We were all struck by your own idea that "predominantly biblical" might be a more acceptable phrase than "predominantly Christian" as a possible governing definition of what schools should try to teach in compulsory RE. Indeed Caroline Cox proposes to use this phrase in moving amendments to the Education Reform Bill in the House of Lords when the time comes. (We need hardly say that she will not seek to embarrass you by attribution, since we regard our meeting with you as having been private).

You mooted the possibility that the Government might allow a free vote on the issue, both in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, with no pressure on the "pay roll" to vote other than according to personal conviction. We could hardly ask you to do more for us than that, particularly in the light of the Bishop of London's reported reservations. But we do now urge you to go at least that far with us, believing as we do that you are not unsympathetic to our aims and anxieties about the future of compulsory RE.

We believe that we can win the argument for amending the Bill, as desired, on its merits; and you will recall the evidence we gave you that many Bishops in the Church of England are in sympathy with our approach. But if the Government set their face against us, then we fear that the Bishops (if not others) will falter. What we believe would be unacceptable, indeed a travesty, would be for the Government to argue that they **must** officially oppose any amendment by Caroline Cox of the sort we discussed, because the Bishops are opposed to it. Some might be; others would not. On a free vote, we believe the majority would support Caroline Cox.



It would be a parody for Her Majesty's Government (the Queen is after all Defender of the Faith!) to whip the Conservative party to oppose Caroline Cox's amendment, simply to help the Bishop of London in the whipping of his fellow Bishops! Let them be honourably divided. They are usually united against us!

*Caroline Cox*

**Caroline Cox**

*James Pawsey*

**James Pawsey**

*Michael Alison*

**Michael Alison**

*Anthony Coombs*

**Anthony Coombs**

eu



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

13 April 1988

I am writing to acknowledge your letter of 13 April which I am drawing to the Prime Minister's attention.

(N.L. WICKS)

The Rt. Hon. Michael Alison, M.P.

Michael ALISON MP file

E-3CQT

21/4



① 26/4

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

14 April 1988

I attach a further letter about the Christian content of religious education from Michael Alison MP and other members of the delegation (that) saw the Prime Minister on Tuesday. My letter of 12 April reported the outcome of that meeting.

In his latest letter Michael Alison asks for assurance that the Government will not whip its supporters in the Lords when Lady Cox's amendment is debated. I should be grateful for your advice on how the Prime Minister might respond to this latest letter. Since it concerns whipping in the Lords, it may be more appropriate for the draft reply to be prepared in the office of the Chief Whip in the Lords rather than by your Department. In any event, please could I have a draft reply by Thursday 21 April.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Lord Privy Seal, and together with a copy of my letter of 12 April to the Private Secretaries to the Chief Whip in the Lords and the Commons.

(N.L. WICKS)

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,  
Department of Education and Science.

870



ELIZABETH HOUSE  
YORK ROAD  
LONDON SE1 7PH  
01-934 9000

N L Wicks Esq  
Principal Private Secretary  
10 Downing Street  
SW1A 2AA

*Dear Nigel*

You have written on a number of occasions recently requesting draft replies to letters concerning the Christian content of religious education and collective worship. Given the understanding reached between Lady Cox and the Bishop of London on how this will be handled in the Lords, we are now able to provide draft replies. I therefore attach suggested replies, all for the Prime Minister's signature, to the following letters.

✓ James Pawsey MP : Letter of 17 March  
✓ Mr Michael Hastings : Letter of 31 March  
(Secretary of the  
Evangelical Alliance)  
✓ The Rt Revd George Carey: Letter of 7 April  
(The Bishop of Bath and  
Wells)  
✓ Michael Allison MP : Letter of 14 April  
✓ Revd Tony Higton : Letter of 14 April

As you will of course realise, all the letters need to be despatched before the Lords' Committee stage debate on 3 May.

*Yours,  
Ton.*

T B JEFFERY  
Private Secretary

*Rt. Hon*  
To: Michael Allison MP  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

DS2A90

Thank you for your letter of 13 April about the Christian content of religious education. You will by now be aware that Caroline Cox has had discussions with the Bishop of London on this matter. As a result, I understand that Caroline has now tabled amendments for discussion at Lords' Committee stage, on the understanding that these will be withdrawn following discussion, and that the Bishop of London will introduce his own amendments at Report stage. The question of a free vote does not therefore arise.

We do seem to be making progress on all of this and I look forward to seeing the outcome when it is discussed in the Lords.

*e. J. B. & - [unclear] [unclear]*  
I am copying this letter to Caroline Cox, Jim Pawsey and Anthony Coombs.

PRIME MINISTER

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

There is a note in your Box from Mr. Baker about next week's debate in the Lords regarding religious education.

There are various letters outstanding from MPs and others regarding this matter. If you are content with the approach proposed by Mr. Baker, I suggest that you write to Mr. James Pawsey and Mr. Michael Alison in the terms of the draft letters attached. Draft replies are also attached to the letters which you have received from Mr. Michael Hastings of the Evangelical Alliance and from the Rev. Tony Higton in case you wish to write to them personally, but I think it would be better if the replies to their letters came from a Private Secretary.

We need to despatch the letters before next Tuesday's debate.

N.L.U.

N. L. WICKS

28 April 1988

CCB 4

I am puzzled. I

Saw Caroline Cox at C.P.S. this evening. She

said the question of a free vote was still not worked - indicating

PRIME MINISTER

by implication that there would be a vote. not



One Minute to see. Any views?

N.C.W. 22.4

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

You asked me to consider further the issues on Christian Religious Education which we discussed with a deputation led by Caroline Cox on 12 April.

I have since then had discussions with the leaders of the Churches. We have, I believe, made significant progress. The Bishop of London has now talked to Caroline Cox and Rodney Elton. As a result, they have undertaken to introduce their amendment as a probing amendment which, after discussion, they will withdraw without a vote on the understanding that the Church of England will be ready to introduce their own amendment at Report Stage. The Bishop of London is now actively considering possible forms of words which will in his view meet the widespread concerns which have been expressed in the Lords during Second Reading about the nature of religious education in our schools. In the Committee Stage on Tuesday, 3 May, he will also stress his view that the strengthening of the religious education provisions in the Bill already agreed with the Churches will provide a powerful reinforcement of the Church's position within the local arrangements. He is ready to stress the commitment of the Church of England to take the lead nationally and locally to secure effective implementation of agreed syllabuses which respect the Christian traditions of our country. In this, he will have the support of the Methodists and the Roman Catholic Church.

There is thus no immediate need for us to reach decisions on the amendment now tabled by Rodney Elton. I shall continue my discussions with the Bishop of London with the aim of ensuring that when this matter returns at Report Stage, the Government can actively support the lead which he offers on behalf of the



Established Church of England. On that basis I believe that we shall have the majority of the House of Lords with us, a view which the Lord Privy Seal shares.

I am copying this minute to the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip in the Lords.

*K.D.*

KB

28 April 1988

Department of Education and Science

CONFIDENTIAL



file-  
CCBA

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

29 April 1988

*Dear Tom,*

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 28 April about the prospective discussion in the Lords of Religious Education.

The Prime Minister is somewhat puzzled by your Secretary of State's report, and in particular the suggestion that the relevant clause will not be pushed to a vote. When she saw Lady Cox last evening at a CPS reception, Lady Cox told her that the question of a free vote was not settled, which the Prime Minister believes indicates, by implication, that there would be a vote. In these circumstances the Prime Minister is not prepared to write to Mr. Alison in the terms of the draft attached to your letter of yesterday, (though she has signed the letters to Mr. Pawsey, Mr. Hastings and the Reverend Higton.)

X | Before writing to Mr. Alison I think that the Prime Minister will need greater assurance that Lady Cox will indeed not press the amendment to a vote. Could I suggest that the Lord Privy Seal might speak to her today to establish the position so that a report can be submitted to the Prime Minister tonight with a view to despatching the letter to Mr. Alison early on Tuesday morning.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Nick Gibbons in the Lord Privy Seal's Office and to the Chief Whip in the Lords.

*Nigel Wicks*

N.L. WICKS

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,  
Department of Education and Science.

CONFIDENTIAL

Michael Alison MP  
10/5

PRIME MINISTER

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

You were unwilling to sign the letter below to Michael Alison since Lady Cox implied to you yesterday evening that there would be a vote on her amendment at Lords Committee Stage. This conflicted with the draft letter to Mr Alison.

I asked the Lord Privy Seal today whether he could discover from Lady Cox her intentions regarding the amendment. Lord Belstead has so far not been able to reach her; but will try to do so over the weekend. If Lord Belstead can confirm the amendment will not be pushed to a vote, the way will be open for you to sign the letter. This needs to be despatched on Tuesday before the debate in the Lords. I will be in touch with the Garden Room girl over the weekend if there is news from Lord Belstead.

N.L.U.

N.L. Wicks

29 April 1988

Garden Rooms,

This has been overruled by  
votes. New draft will be  
here by Tuesday 10 May.

N.C.U.

29.4.88



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

3 May 1988

Thank you for your letter of 13 April about the Christian content of religious education. You will by now be aware that Caroline Cox has had discussions with the Bishop of London on this matter. As a result, I understand that Caroline has now tabled amendments for discussion at Lords' Committee stage, on the understanding that these will be withdrawn following discussion, and that the Bishop of London will introduce his own amendments at Report stage. The question of a free vote does not therefore arise.

We do seem to be making progress on all of this and I look forward to seeing the outcome when it is discussed in the Lords.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the co-signatories of your letter, Caroline Cox, Jim Pawsey and Anthony Coombs.

The Rt. Hon. Michael Alison, M.P.



ELIZABETH HOUSE  
YORK ROAD  
LONDON SE1 7PH  
01-934 9000

N L Wicks Esq  
Principal Private Secretary  
10 Downing Street  
SW1A 0AA

- 9 MAY 1988

*Dear Nigel*

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*file with R*  
Thank you for your letter of 29 April about Lady Cox's amendment and related correspondence.

As you will know, in the event Lady Cox agreed to withdraw the amendment, subject to the Bishop of London coming forward with an alternative form of words at ReportStage. The Prime Minister has still of course to reply to the letter of 13 April signed by Mr Alison, Baroness Cox, Mr Pawsey and Mr Coombs. I attach a suggested reply letter.

*Yours sincerely*

*Tom Jeffery*

T B JEFFERY  
Private Secretary

Michael Alison Esq MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

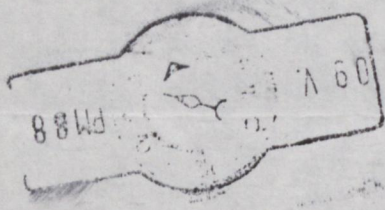
*OGZELT*

Thank you for your letter of 13 April, signed also by Caroline Cox, Jim Pawsey and Anthony Coombs.

I was glad to see that, in the event, Caroline felt able to withdraw her amendment, subject to the Bishop of London bringing forward an alternative form of words at the Report stage of the Bill. There was clearly a great deal of support from all sides of the House of Lords for the spirit of her amendment, as well anxiety about what is happening in some schools at present. I hope that the Bishop is able to come forward with an amendment on which we are all able to agree.

I am copying this letter to Caroline Cox, Jim Pawsey and Anthony Coombs.

EDUCATION: Policy Pt 18





10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

Michael Alison's letter requesting a free vote in the Lords on Christian Religious Education.

You decided not to reply to this letter before the debate last week on Lady Cox's amendment to the Education Reform Bill because it was unclear at that stage whether Lady Cox would withdraw her amendment.

In the event, Lady Cox agreed to withdraw the amendment, subject to the Bishop of London coming forward with an alternative form of words at Report stage. I suggest that you now reply to Mr. Alison in the terms of the draft attached.

N. L. W.

N. L. WICKS

9 May 1988





AS

cc: DES  
AH

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

10 May 1988

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 13 April, signed also by Caroline Cox, Jim Pawsey and Anthony Coombs.

I was glad to see that, in the event, Caroline felt able to withdraw her amendment, subject to the Bishop of London bringing forward an alternative form of words at the Report stage of the Bill. There was clearly a great deal of support from all sides of the House of Lords for the spirit of her amendment, as well as anxiety about what is happening in some schools at present. I hope that the Bishop is able to come forward with an amendment on which we are all able to agree.

I am copying this letter to Caroline Cox, Jim Pawsey and Anthony Coombs.

Yours ever

Michael

The Rt. Hon. Michael Alison, M.P.

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