

EDUCATION BILL: COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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I met Caroline Cox earlier today. She was extremely upset about the way in which she feels a number of peers - Thorneycroft, Renton, Elton and herself - have been misled over the amendments dealing with collective worship in schools.

The Bishop of London has produced a draft amendment for Clause 6 which is strongly supported by the Board of Education officials, the Secretary of State, and DES officials but is different in two ways from that which they were expected to produce:

- it does not allow separate acts of collective worship for people of different faiths;
- it does not give parental choice.

The basic issue is whether the Government should permit different faiths to have separate acts of worship or whether it should insist on one multi-faith act for all schools. It is an issue between Christians, Jews and Muslims on the one hand who wish to emphasise the integrity of their faith and the syncretistic and humanistic approach of the multi-faith lobby on the other. I attach a memorandum from Caroline (flag A).

--- I attach letters from the Chief Rabbi (flag B), a leading Muslim (flag C) and Lord Elton (flag D), which show very clearly the point at issue and how strongly they feel about it.



The DES are opposed to Caroline Cox's position because they claim:

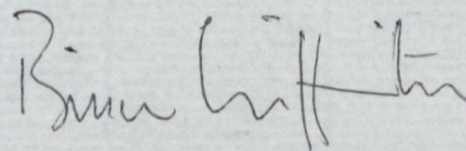
- a. it is divisive, eg in a school in which Muslims made up 70% of pupils and Christians 30%;
- b. it might lead to Islamic fundamentalism.

Caroline's argument against this is that the prospects of Islamic fundamentalism are very slight and that the number of schools in which there are major splits, such as above, is again very small. To that one might add that a school should educate children to accept and live with differences of religious opinion. They will have to do so later in the real world. It is absurd to treat such religious differences as tantamount to civil war.

#### Recommendation

The issue for Government is whether the Secretary of State should back the Bishop of London.

As the Bill is effectively a parents charter, it seems incongruous to prevent parental choice over collective worship. The Government should not be seen to back multi-faith worship and antagonise other faiths.



BRIAN GRIFFITHS





The Rt. Hon. The Lord Jakobovits  
Chief Rabbi

Adler House  
Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HN

30th June, 1988

The Rt. Revd. Lord Bishop of London  
House of Lords  
London SW1

*Very dear Bishop.*

I am sorry my time was so pressed at yesterday afternoon's meeting, though I doubt if more time would have made much difference to the outcome.

For my part, I had warmly welcomed and supported the upgrading of religion in the new Bill, including the emphasis that it should be Christian "in the main", to reflect the Christian traditions of this country. I did so on the assumption that other faiths would likewise be encouraged and facilitated in transmitting their religious heritage to their children where the parents desired this.

I believed, and I continue to believe, that this would contribute enormously to the moral and spiritual fibre of the nation.

It now appears that this is not to be, or only in a very attenuated form. Neither the worship nor the education, as far as I could understand it yesterday, will be of any distinct faith - neither distinctly Christian for the majority nor distinctly reflecting the religious traditions of the minority. Children will be expected to participate in a collective experience in which the religious orientation will be at best neutral and at worst alien to many of our pupils. I fear the new Act may thus prove retrograde in this respect, inasmuch as previously such neutral or alien influences were less pronounced.

I appreciate the argument about a secular backlash. This could result from the up-grading of Religious Education in the National Curriculum; but I cannot see what backlash could be produced by defining the lines of demarcation between our respective faiths more clearly. The secularists simply do not want religious education or influence altogether; it makes little difference to them whether we teach or observe our faiths "collectively" or distinctively.





Nor can I see substance in the argument that our schools would lose cohesiveness by allowing sizeable groups of, say, thirty children or more where requested by their parents to enjoy a religious experience, whether worship or education, in their own natural faith environment, thus giving them pride and recognition in their religious distinctiveness. There are plenty of other curricular and extra-curricular studies and activities which will ensure the "oneness" of the school community.

By all means, let our children receive some instruction in the beliefs and teachings of other faiths, but not at the expense of appreciating and cherishing their own. I believe truly devout and informed observers of any faith make better citizens, build more stable homes, and contribute more to society.

I enclose a further copy of the proposals I had drafted out in the hope that, perhaps even in some modified form, the principles so dear to many of us, majority and minorities alike, can somehow be embodied in the final Amendment to be presented at the Third Reading.

I take the liberty in communicating all this so frankly to you since I know that in the ultimate objectives our thinking so largely converges on the way in which we want our faiths to inspire the rising generation.

For their information, I am sending copies of this letter to several of the participants in yesterday's consultation, as well as to the Secretary of State, especially since my absence in America for the next five days will make it impossible for me to contribute to the discussion until after my return on Wednesday night.

With warm greetings and much appreciation for all your personal kindness and understanding,

*Very sincerely yours,  
Isaac Jakobovits*

Lord Jakobovits  
Chief Rabbi

Enclosure

c.c. Baroness Cox  
Lord Elton  
Lord Renton  
Lord Thorneycroft  
The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker



DRAFT PROPOSALS submitted by Lord Jakobovits

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

The arrangements for the collective worship in a school shall, in respect of each school day, provide for a single act of worship for all pupils or for separate acts of worship for pupils in different age groups or in different school groups or of different faiths.

After stipulating that such collective worship shall be Christian in the main, the clause is to be followed by a sub-section:

For minority faiths separate assemblies or acts of worship shall be provided where requested to do so by a reasonable proportion of parents, and where the number of children involved is appropriate.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

To the general provisions for religious education being in the main Christian and reflecting the Christian character and traditions of this country, add:

For pupils of minority faiths, where a reasonable proportion of parents so request and the numbers are appropriate, arrangements shall be made for religious education according to those faiths under the direction of the recognised central religious or educational authority of the religious community concerned.





The Muslim Educational Trust الوقف التعليمي الإسلامي

130 Stroud Green Road, London, N4 3RZ Telephone: 01-272 8502

Our Reference

Your Reference

Date  
29 June 1988

Baroness Cox  
House Of Lords  
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Baroness Cox,

RE: AMENDMENTS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Enclosed please find a copy of our letter to Mr Kenneth Baker MP, Secretary of State for Education & Science on the above subject.

We would be extremely grateful if you could kindly take into consideration the concerns of the Muslim community (second largest religious minority in the UK) during future deliberations in the House of Lords on the Education Reform Bill.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Ghulam Sarwar  
Director.





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Date

29 June 1988

Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
D E S  
Elizabeth House  
York Road  
London SE1

Dear Mr Baker,

RE: AMENDMENTS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION INTRODUCED  
BY THE BISHOP OF LONDON

We are deeply concerned at some uncertainty and confusion (as reported in the Guardian, 28 June 1988, page 21) arising out of the amendments on Religious Education introduced by the Bishop of London in the House of Lords affecting the rights of the minority faiths, especially the Muslims. The Guardian report mentions, "the Bill as amended fails to provide minority faiths with the explicit rights to conduct their own separate assemblies or be taught separately their own religion."

While we are in favour of the natural primacy of the Christianity in the collective worship and in the religious education for Christians, at the same time, we would ask for explicit provision in the Education Reform Bill for the minority faiths to pursue their own forms of worship and religious education.

We firmly believe that you have no intention to impose Christianity on non-Christians and deprive the minority faiths of their legitimate rights. We rather hope that you will do everything possible to allay any fears of the minority faiths resulting from the amendments.

In this context, I would like to reiterate some of the basic educational concerns of the Muslim community:

1. The right to withdraw Muslim children from the collective worship and Religious education must be preserved in the education reform bill.
2. Muslim children must be provided with the necessary facilities within the school premises to hold their Islamic assemblies and receive Islamic education.
3. Section 26(b) of the Education Act, 1944 should be amended to allow the local education authorities to facilitate and meet the cost of religious worship and religious education of the minority faiths.



4. Suitable facilities should be provided by the LEAs to Muslim children to offer their prayer in schools with 10 Muslim pupils on its roll.
5. Muslim girls of secondary school age should be allowed to observe their religious rules to wear modest dress and headscarf conforming to the colour of the school uniform in order to enable them to do their Islamic worship and attend Islamic religious education.

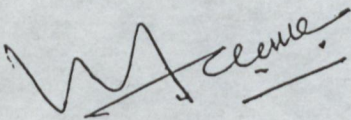
May we take the opportunity to thank you for all the positive steps your department have undertaken to strengthen the moral fibre of the multi-faith and multi-cultural society in which we live.

Finally, we urge upon you to introduce relevant change in the Bishop of London's amendments explicitly providing for the rights of minority faiths in having their own forms of worship and religious education.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,



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- cc:
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  2. Rt Rev Lord Robert Runcie
  3. Lady Hooper
  4. Baroness Cox
  5. Rt Hon Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos
  6. Lord Jenkins of Hillhead





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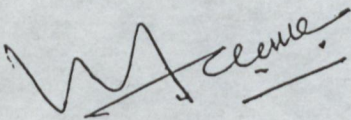
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