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## **Schools told to end religious instruction and teach morality instead**

The Independent (15.06.2015)  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/schools-told-to-end-religious-instruction-and-teach-morality-instead-10319326.html> - Religious instruction should be banned from schools and be the preserve of Sunday schools, madrassas or the home, according to proposals by the former Education Secretary Charles Clarke for a radical overhaul of religious education and the way faith schools operate.

Legislation compelling schools to hold a daily act of “predominantly Christian” worship in assemblies should also be scrapped, the Labour former frontbencher argues in a report jointly compiled with the religious education expert Professor Linda Woodhead, from Lancaster University.

In recommendations that will be studied keenly by faith and schooling experts, they argue that the emphasis should shift away from merely religious education, with pupils being taught religious and moral education instead.

However, the report stops short of urging faith schools to abandon the controversial practice of giving preference in admissions to children of a certain religion – arguing that children of families who regularly worship in a local church should have an enhanced right to attend its faith school.

Mr Clarke, who also served as Home Secretary, and Professor Woodhead conclude: “We do not believe that abolition of faith schools is either desirable or feasible, but we think that reforms could be beneficial and properly explored.”

The Coalition published plans for reforming religious education before the general election, outlining that at least two faiths should be studied by pupils at GCSE and including greater provision for ethics and philosophy – as long as it was in the context of religion.

But in a foreword to the new report, the authors state that a more fundamental overhaul of the way religion is approached in schools is overdue, with current legislation in the main dating back to the Education Act 1944.

Mr Clarke and Professor Woodhead write that they “do not agree with those who urge that religion should somehow be excluded from school life and should therefore play little or no role in the state education system.” However, they argue that religious instruction should not take place in schools because “it allows little or no time for questioning or criticism by pupils and/or ignores (or even distorts or caricatures) other forms of religion and belief and grants them no legitimacy”.

Attempts to change or strengthen the current commitment to an act of daily worship – which previous research has shown as many as two-thirds of schools ignore or are unable to meet – would be fraught with legal difficulties, their pamphlet says.

“On balance we favour removing the requirement altogether and so repealing those parts of legislation which require schools to provide daily acts of worship,” they say.

But the pair maintain that it is important for governors to continue to provide for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of today’s pupils – possibly through a broader approach to assemblies. The education standards watchdog, Ofsted, should monitor whether schools are fulfilling this commitment without recourse to legislation.

“All pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in a period of reflection” aimed at encouraging “spiritual, moral and cultural development”, they add, arguing: “We believe the removal of the element of obligation combined with the approach described will rejuvenate assemblies rather than the opposite.”

The move away from a “predominantly Christian” act of collective worship is essential in the wake of “the broadening of Britain’s religious and cultural identity,” they say.

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## **British Muslim women 71% more likely to be unemployed due to workplace discrimination**

The Independent (15.04.2015) - Discrimination against Muslim women in the workplace means they are much more likely to be unemployed than white Christian women - even when they have the same qualifications and language skills - research shows.

British Muslim women are around 70 per cent more likely to be looking unsuccessfully for work, according to the University of Bristol’s Dr Nabil Khattab, who spoke at the British Sociological Association’s annual conference in Glasgow.

The recent national Labour Force survey showed the unemployment rate among Muslim women was 18 per cent, compared with 9 per cent for Hindu women and 4 per cent for white Christian women. This has previously been attributed to Muslim women being less well educated and less fluent in English, but Dr Khattab says his data shows the discrepancy is also likely to be explained by employer discrimination.

Dr Khattab analysed a sample of 2,643 from the national Labour Force survey to compare the rates of those looking for work without success. He adjusted the sample in order to compare women with similar educational level and language abilities and controlled for marital status, children and strength of religious belief.

He found that Muslim women were 71 per cent more likely than white Christian women to be unemployed, even when they had the same educational level and language skills. Hindu women were 57 per cent more likely to be unemployed than white Christian women.

“Economic activity among Muslim women in the UK remains considerably lower and their unemployment rate remains significantly higher than the majority group even after controlling for qualifications and other individual characteristics,” Dr Khattab said.

He added that the conspicuousness of Muslim women's religious background was likely to be a key factor in explaining their exclusion. "They wear the hijab or other religious symbols which makes them more visible and as such exposed to greater discrimination."

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## **This UK antisemitism survey would have shocked my great uncle Alex**

The Guardian (14.01.2015)

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/14/uk-antisemitism-survey-holocaust-france-jewish-britain> - He survived the Holocaust and never trusted France - but he always thought Jewish people could feel at home in Britain

On 20 September 1943, my great uncle Alex found for the first and last time in his life that the smarts for which he would always be renowned in his family were no longer enough: he was arrested in Nice and sent to the death camps.

Alex knew what awaited him there; his older brother Jakob had done this journey already and died in Auschwitz a year before. So he dug up the floorboards of the train with his stubby fingers, slipped through the hole, lay on the track while the train rattled over him and walked back to Paris, hidden along the way by communists. He then joined the [Resistance](#), but he never trusted France again. In later life, he gave back the Légion d'Honneur he was awarded for his war service after Charles de Gaulle described Jews in 1967 as "[elite, domineering and sure of themselves](#)".

Are you tired of Holocaust stories? Apologies for bringing up all that "unpleasantness" again, but I've been thinking about Alex this week. According to a [YouGov poll](#), 45% of Britons agreed with at least one antisemitic statement put to them, such as "Jews chase money more than other people" (endorsed by a whopping 25%), and "Jews' loyalty to Israel makes them less loyal to Britain than other Britons" (20%).

I feel less certain about another survey this week, by the [Campaign Against Antisemitism](#), conducted on social media, which claimed that 54% of British Jews feel they have no future in the UK. But the tenacity of antisemitic beliefs is striking even in Britain, where, according to a [separate report](#) last year by Jewish Policy Research, 47% of the British Jewish respondents felt antisemitism was not a very big problem (although 40% did feel antisemitism had increased in the past five years).

This would have astonished Alex. He adored Britain - he had been in Britain as part of the [Free French](#) before he was captured, and he often spoke about the comfort he got listening to the BBC World Service during his fighting days. I imagine it will astonish most Britons too, even those who, in a dark and unacknowledged place inside, instinctively agree with the statements posed by YouGov. You don't have to travel too far to find them in the UK. In fact, you can just turn on the BBC.

One Jewish woman, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, told BBC reporter Tim Wilcox this week that the horrific murder of four people in a kosher supermarket made her worry about the return of Jewish persecution. "Many critics, though, of Israel's policy would suggest that the Palestinians suffer hugely at Jewish hands as well," [Wilcox said](#) - all but saying: "So swings and roundabouts, really."

Wilcox later apologised on Twitter for a “poorly phrased” question, as though the problem here was one of grammar. Only two months previously this same reporter, in an on-air discussion about Miliband [losing Jewish support](#), said: “A lot of these prominent Jewish faces will be very much against the political mansion tax, presumably.” They most certainly will! You know what those Jews are like – always watching their massive pile of shekels, with their prominent faces and their prominent noses.

Now we turn to Paris, where the terrible events of last week would not have surprised Alex nearly as much. There were an astonishing number of [attacks on Jews and synagogues](#) in France last year, with the result that twice as many Jews emigrated to Israel in 2014 than the year before.

Since the awful killings there has been plenty of talk from the media and politicians about how we all mustn't let this atrocity give rise to an anti-Muslim backlash. This is right and good. But can we take a few minutes to look at the lash itself, as well as dealing with the backlash? Four Jewish people were [killed because they were in a Jewish supermarket](#), yet this inconvenient truth has been relatively little remarked upon, certainly compared with the angsting over the parameters of free speech at Charlie Hebdo, or commentary about the irony of the terrorists killing a fellow Muslim, the police officer Ahmed Merabet.

Is this because killing Jews is seen as par for the course when it comes to terrorist attacks? Because that does seem to be true. Going back to the attacks in Mumbai in 2008, the killers specifically sought out a Jewish community, Nariman House, and tortured and killed six Jews, including the Rabbi and his wife. The Taj Hotel has become the symbol of the Mumbai attacks but, [according to some reports](#), it was actually Nariman House that was the terrorists' main target. Already the killer of the Jewish people in the supermarket is being referred to, incorrectly, as “the Charlie Hebdo killer”.

So just par for the course? Maybe, but I don't think that's quite what's happening here. Jews are, as the YouGov report made very clear, seen as a pretty dominant people: in charge of the media, you know. And Hollywood too. Elite, domineering and sure of themselves. So when they are attacked, there is a sense that – well, they kinda brought this on themselves, and there are other groups that are less elite that need more looking after.

I'm not sure why this is an either/or situation. A person can be horrified by anti-Muslim prejudice and also terrified by the attacks on Jews, and to talk about one is not an endorsement of the other. For a BBC reporter to balance the killing of Jews in Paris against the atrocities in Palestine is the definition of idiocy. Not as bad as expressing outright sympathy with the killer of the Jews, as the reliably idiotic “comedian” [Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala did on Facebook](#), but still bad. This is not the victim Olympics, with only one possible “winner”. These were people who were killed, not political statements.

My great uncle Alex led a wonderful life after the war as an art dealer, but, as I said, he never again trusted the country that had betrayed him so badly. When I asked once why he refused to keep his paintings in a bank vault, preferring instead to keep them hidden in his house, he replied: “Because they always come for the Jews.” Plus ça change.

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