

Why is the state funding the indoctrination of children in schools with dangerous ideologies?

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The Prime Minister, David Cameron, made a statement last week about the Nairobi shopping mall massacre which almost beggars belief. He said:

"These appalling terrorist attacks that take place where the perpetrators claim they do it in the name of a religion – they don't. They do it in the name of terror, violence and extremism and their warped view of the world. They don't represent Islam or Muslims in Britain or anywhere else in the world."

Nobody but a politician scrabbling around for votes could possibly imagine that separating Christians from Muslims and then killing the Christians was not an act related to religion. It might be the extreme end of religion, but it was a religious act – pure and simple.

The danger is that in denying it in such extreme circumstances it makes it easier for him to deny it in other instances.

Last week we were reporting on the goings-on at a Derby state school with an Islamic ethos. What emerged — girls treated as inferior to boys; women teachers of all religions made to wear head coverings; ham sandwiches banned; no stringed instruments on the premises; no singing (except Islamic prayers) and the whole curriculum overwhelmed by religious studies and praying — is part of the same pattern of denial.

To pretend that such a school is not divisive is just plain foolish. Some educationists actually argue that such schools *increase* integration and social cohesion.

But Mr Cameron, and his acolyte Michael Gove, intend to increase the number of these schools. They seem completely unconcerned that Islamic schools with such an unbalanced emphasis on religion pose a potential danger to us all. Our politicians appear to make no connection between this inculcation of ultra-orthodox religion with the growth of religious extremism.

How can children raised in this "ethos" have a balanced view of the world? How does telling them that they are the true believers and everyone else is an infidel help them respect their fellow citizens?

How have we allowed state schools to fall into the hands of people with such a sinister agenda of indoctrination?

This coalition government is complacent about it, but unfortunately so would be a Labour government. No-one in parliament is prepared to even question the desirability of swamping this nation's children in religion while they are at school.

By permitting the extremists and the zealots — determined and well-organised as they are — to install their agenda in our schools, we are storing up big trouble for the not-too-distant future.

The answer is not just to dismantle Muslim schools, but the whole ridiculous "faith school" system.

Terry Sanderson

Terry Sanderson was the former president of the National Secular Society. The views expressed in our blogs are those of the author and may not necessarily represent the views of the NSS.

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