

It's not only Islamists who have Trojan Horses

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*Those with a vested interest in the continuation of 'faith schools' have started their fight back against the growing number of critics, says **Terry Sanderson**.*

After the furore of the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair, a lot of commentators reached the conclusion that the problems lay not just with Islamist extremism but with the general over-emphasis on religion in schools - and in single-faith schools particularly.

Now, the [apologists](#) for 'faith schools' are [coming back](#) at them [with a vengeance](#).

You will notice that the Archbishop of Canterbury has started to refer to "church schools" rather than "faith schools" in an attempt to distance the schools run by his brand of Christianity from those run by other religions that are in trouble.

Enthusiasts repeat endlessly that the Birmingham schools at the centre of this scandal were not "faith schools".

That is true technically, but in reality they were completely dominated by religious teaching and practice. They had been hijacked by people determined to inculcate a rather strict and conservative form of Islam into the children who were obliged to go there by law.

And the taxpayer was paying for them to do it.

Then came an Observer poll showing that two thirds of those asked thought "faith schools" should not be funded by the taxpayer.

Has this made the political establishment rethink its unswerving support for these schools?

Well, we know that Mr Gove and the Conservative party remain determined to hand more and more of the education system over to religious interests. The academy and free school systems have given religious groups almost carte blanche to pump whatever nonsense they like into children's heads (creationism must be reserved for RE classes, the DfE has ruled, but many schools under religious domination will take absolutely no notice of this until they are caught out and challenged).

The education secretary knows that many of the free schools and academies are being opportunistically used for evangelising, but seems unconcerned. He appears to think it is an appropriate – even desirable - way to educate children in state schools.

Now, according to a report in the Catholic magazine [the Tablet](#), the Labour Party, too, has reiterated its total commitment to pushing more religion into schools and down pupils' throats.

A Labour spokesperson told the Tablet:

"The Labour Party believes faith schools make a hugely valuable contribution to our schools system. England benefits from many outstanding faith schools which offer high quality education and ensure their students take on values of respect and understanding for other faiths and communities. A future Labour government would support them to continue to play this important role in the future."

The spokesperson is unnamed, but the quote comes after the recent notorious "[prayer breakfast](#)" held in Parliament and attended by the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour Party and self-identified atheist Ed Miliband.

Mr Miliband seems to have bought into the idea that Church of England schools are neutral in their approach to religion and give a balanced view of it in its schools.

But the 'Trojan Horse' approach to education – so rightly decried in Birmingham - is not restricted to Islamists. The Church of England has its own agenda of indoctrination which it is quite public about. When you look at this document:

"PROMOTING THE VISION

8. The diocesan bishop has responsibility for setting and leading the diocesan vision for ministry and mission. The strategy will be specific to each diocese, but the importance of the place of education and schools in that vision might be described under the following areas:

- a. ... b. Church of England schools provide appropriate nurture for children of the faith whilst engaging with those of different faiths or no faith; they are a resource for mission.
- c. Church of England schools offer a distinctive education rooted in the Christian narrative.
- d. The purpose of education is to fulfil human potential, meet the needs of society and transmit knowledge and culture. Fulfilling human potential rightly requires a focus on progress and achievement, excellence and high quality of educational experience, but also through offering a life enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ. How this is done will be determined by local context but this offer should run through the life of a school like words through a stick of rock."

Doesn't this have echoes of the Trojan Horse letter that cause so much controversy in Birmingham? It may be cloaked in CofE language, but surely the aim is the same – to promote one particular view of religion over all others.

And not only that, the Church of England is now spending [huge amounts](#) of its school budgets on employing chaplains to reinforce its religious message.

As, NSS campaigns manager, Stephen Evans wrote in a recent [blog](#):

"In the report, chaplains describe their role as "holy loitering" and say 'hanging around' is an important feature of the chaplain's role.

"When they're not "holy loitering", chaplains say they spend their time "commending the Christian faith", "maintaining relationships with the local Church", organising and leading school worship and teaching religious education (if you thought RE was objective and balanced these days, think again).

Chaplains are also there to police the school's "religious ethos". As the report states:

"The chaplain represents the Church and reminds the school that it is part of the ministry of the Church. This function brings the authority of the Bishop and also a commitment to the distinctive Anglican identity, in all its rich variety, of the worship and life of the school."

So, while Islamist extremists are rooted out of schools in Birmingham, equally determined proselytisers in the Church of England are invited in to take over more schools.

And both of the main political parties (and probably the Lib Dems, too) intend to make the job easier and easier for them.

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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