

No such thing as a 'faith child'

Posted: Tue, 19 Aug 2014 by [John Sargeant](#)

*The state and society undermine children's rights, when they treat them as an extension of their parents' religious identity, argues **John Sargeant**.*

Adults are extolled in the Christian tradition to be childlike in their acceptance of the faith. Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." In the first letter of Peter "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation -"

That pure special diet is one some want their children to be exclusively fed. Proverbs reminds such parents, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Rather than a child free to explore the religions of this world, its cultures and philosophies so they can create their own identity, it is about a child continuing a parent's self identity.

Children are not given the vote or expected to do jury service for a simple reason; they are children. The complexities of the big questions in society, or determining innocence or guilt in a trial would make it absurd to argue they have the competence that an adult would. There is no such thing as a Muslim child, an atheist child, let alone a Capitalist child or Marxist child, for this reason.

However, some will try and argue that children have their own faith. That complex questions as to the route to salvation, the nature of God, which religion is the true religion for this, can be answered by a child. That it is them expressing their faith when it comes to dress at school.

[John Lewis is offering the hijab as part of selling school uniforms.](#) The [usual bigots and hate mongers](#) are in hysterics in ways they are not about other expressions of faith in school. Like mandated Christian prayer at assembly, as if the state should have any right to say how we should worship. Selective outrage at children being used as an extension of parent's beliefs so as to further the far right, need condemning.

[\[My article defending right to wear Niqab, let alone hijab, in public can be read here\]](#)

Parents have the household, and place of worship to teach and provide a spiritual diet for their child. A school is an academic establishment. It is not the place to be a surrogate parent in religious instruction. Ideas and values, which may challenge the religious views of parents, must not be hindered.

Children clapping, listening to music, singing happy birthday, dancing, mixed gender physical education, learning about other faiths – these are not something to exempt children from. No child would naturally do so without being told this is wrong, this is against our religion so you are forbidden.

There needs to be one place where children are free from prejudices masquerading as faith to distort their world view. Women are equal to men – there is no need to segregate them in class, or to cover your head when puberty and menstruation occurs (let alone before) as a sign of religious observance. In the classroom, you are not children of faith. Not owned by the culture or religion of

your parents or a religious community, that demands you – or teachers – are adorned as such.

Adults are independent autonomous individuals. That can make their own choices. For example, in South Africa there is a drive to [increase circumcision](#). Men are not lining the streets for the operation. The solution proposed is to mandate new born children who cannot object or consider [that using condoms](#) would be *the* effective way at reducing HIV transmission.

So unless you are going to argue that out of the mouth's of babes such permission would be forthcoming, that toddlers could vote in a referendum on Scottish independence, that a young adolescent is ready to hold high office as political views fully formed – stop claiming there is such a thing as a Muslim child, a Christian Child, or an atheist child.

Let children have a free space where they are not a proxy in culture wars, the pawns of orthodox religious views or bit players for racist propaganda. One area of their lives where they can learn in an environment that encourages them to think critically for themselves. Promoting an all round education. Schools must have that function or else children will not have their own space to develop on their own terms.

A school uniform is about identity, that they are students of an educational establishment. Not one that encourages them to be abstractions of a parent's faith to make their children different from others. Social cohesion matters, and in a childlike way school uniforms work:

Macy Vallance, a year-eight student, says: "I like uniforms because everyone is the same and no one can be left out by the way they are dressed. Our new uniform looks smarter, which is good."

My uniform might not be what I would wear in my own time, but it gives me a sense of belonging, takes away the pressure of what to wear and deters the bullies. School uniform isn't fashionable, but that's exactly why I think it should be here to stay.

[\[The Guardian\]](#)

A sense of belonging without anyone feeling left out or different. That is the ball game, which really encourages children to grow. Segregation, in all it's guises, must be resisted. It is the reason religious additions to school uniform must be challenged.

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