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One in 20 Brits has suffered religious hate crime

Christian Today (12.11.2014) –

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/one.in.20.brits.has.suffered.religious.hate.crime/42934.htm> One in 20 people living in Britain has been the victim of a religious hate crime in the last 12 months, according to a new poll this month.

Opinium Research surveyed more than 2,000 people and asked if they had been the victim of any type of hate crime, including verbal abuse, harassment, damage to property and different types of prejudice.

Overall, 5 per cent had experienced religious hate crime, but that figure rose to 15 per cent in the North East and 11 per cent, more than one in ten, in London. Both are areas populated by large numbers of Muslims. The lowest figure for religious hate crime were in Yorkshire and Humberside, and in Wales. Northern Ireland was just below the average, with 4 per cent of people having experienced a religious hate crime.

More people suffered hate crime in relation to prejudice around disability and race than religion. An average 6 per cent reported a disability hate crime, but that figure rose to 17 per cent, nearly one in five, again in the North East, and 12 per cent, more than one in ten, in London. Racial hate crimes similarly peaked in the North East, and then London.

The level for homophobic and sexist hate crimes were the same as religion, experienced by one in 20. Again, the highest rate was in the North East with London running a close second.

Of those suffering racial hate crimes, most reported that it took the form of bullying, verbal abuse and internet trolling. But surprisingly large numbers also received hate mail and suffered damage to property and harassment.

Religious hate crime mainly took the form of harassment, physical assault and internet abuse, but there were also significant amounts of domestic abuse, verbal abuse, hate mail, vandalism and bullying.

Incidents were most frequent against young men and women aged 18-34, and nearly half reported the incidents. However, more than four out of ten did not intend to go to the police.

Atheist Ex-Muslims Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoan must be granted asylum by Home Office

Campaign by the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (05.08.2014) <http://ex-muslim.org.uk/2014/08/urgent-action-atheist-ex-muslims-sher-shah-jogzei-syed-muhammad-tabish-and-muhammad-shamoan-must-be-granted-asylum-by-home-office> - Pakistani ex-Muslim atheists Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoan are currently detained in Harmondsworth IRC, which is a Cat B prison. Their crime? They have left Islam and want to live a life free from threats and intimidations prevalent in Pakistan.

Jogzei's date for deportation has been set for 5th August 2014. Tabish's deportation on 5th August has been cancelled and he has been granted 5 days to prepare for a fresh asylum trial.

The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain Case Manager Tanjir Sugar visited the three men at the detention to find out more about their cases and offer support. One of the men, Sher Shah was harassed by some of his fellow Muslim detainees. Rather than being given protection, he has been taken into isolation.

The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain knows only too well the dangers involved for those who renounce Islam and become atheists in countries where Sharia rules apply. Pakistan is officially an Islamic Republic. The government often uses its blasphemy law to prosecute atheists and those who allegedly hurt religious sentiments or defame Islam's prophet Muhammad.

The above three men face great risk of persecution for openly and publicly leaving Islam and for being critical of Islam if they are returned. They have also been ostracised from their families and have no safe place to return to.

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain calls on the Home Office to immediately release Pakistani ex-Muslim atheists Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoan from detention and grant them asylum.

To support the cases of these men, please Tweet the Home Office: @ukhomeoffice or write to Home Secretary Theresa May asking for their right to asylum at 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF or via email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Role of religion in schools under pressure after Trojan Horse scandal

The Telegraph (14.08.2014) <http://wwrn.org/articles/43165/> - Almost 40 leading academics, peers and clerics are backing calls for a sweeping inquiry into the role of religion in British schools in the wake of the Trojan Horse scandal.

In a letter to The Daily Telegraph, the signatories, ranging from prominent atheists to Christian and Jewish clergy, say parts of the education system are becoming "insular and divisive" and that clear rules about how far faith groups should influence schools are now urgently needed.

They say that despite a stream of education reforms in recent decades basic questions about the place of religion in the classroom have not been properly debated for 70 years.

The alliance is calling for a royal commission or public inquiry to re-examine issues such as compulsory worship and the place of Religious Education on the curriculum as well as deeply controversial questions such as selection rules for faith schools.

They say that unless a new "consensus" is reached, scandals along the lines of the Trojan Horse affair, involving hard-line Muslim groups attempting to take control of schools in Birmingham, could become more and more common.

It also follows a call from the Church of England's head of education, the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev John Pritchard, for the requirement on schools to have a compulsory act of collective worship in assembly to be dropped because of the decline of Christianity in Britain.

But any attempt to water down the influence of religion in schools will be fiercely resisted by churches.

Last year Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales issued an impassioned defence of religious schools as a "precious right" and accused secular campaign groups of "sow division".

He was speaking as he opened a new Catholic school in west London which had been strongly opposed by campaigners including several who have signed the letter calling for an inquiry.

The signatories, led by Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain – chairman of the Accord Coalition, which campaigns against selection on religious grounds – include prominent atheists such as AC Grayling, the philosopher, Dr Adam Rutherford, the geneticist and Prof Jim Al-Khalili the Iraqi-born British theoretical physicist.

But it also includes five Church of England priests and leading representatives of the Methodist, Unitarian and United Reform churches as well as Buddhist and Muslim figures and two former education ministers: Baroness Blackstone and Lord Howarth.

"As a society we must treat religion and belief in schools in a way that is fair, inclusive and sustainable, yet there has been no overarching review of the place of religion in schools since the 1944 Education Act, which marks its 70th anniversary this month," they wrote.

Issuing a call for a sweeping inquiry into religion in education, they added: "Schools' impact upon the cohesiveness of society can be profound.

"If fairness, mutual understanding and respect are important, then we must consider schools' contribution in these areas.

"Future generations will not thank us if we do not show leadership and instead leave them with an education system that is insular and divisive."

Dr Romain said: "The response to the Birmingham cases must not be to single out groups, or brush problems under the carpet, but for government to show leadership and re-examine the current settlement, so society can move towards an education system that is fairer, sustainable and more inclusive."

Andrew Copson, chief executive of the British Humanist Association, who is among the signatories, said: "While we continue to have so many Christian and Jewish schools, offering up an "us vs them" mentality in education, it is not at all surprising that some others will want to have Muslim, Hindu and Sikh schools.

"Either we provide them, thus causing ever increasing segregation in our education system; or we do not, thus leaving individuals to start to see certain schools as 'theirs' even when they are not legally designated as religious, leading to problems like those we have recently experienced.

"There is another way forward for our society. We can acknowledge that the decades-old principles governing the place of beliefs in state schools are no longer fit for contemporary society, get completely away from the whole notion of different schools belonging to different religious communities, and build a better, more inclusive future for our children."

Nick Spencer, research director at the religious think-tank Theos, said: "The idea of formally reviewing how schools engage with religious and non-religious belief systems is a good one. Much has changed in 20 years and we need to recognise that

"However, when many of the signatories calling for one are well known for their hostility to religious faith, we should be cautious.

"We wouldn't want the Trojan Horse to become a stalking horse for the anti-faith schools brigade."

Jehovah's Witness congregation lodges appeal with charity tribunal over statutory inquiry

Third Sector (25.07.2014) - A Manchester-based Jehovah's Witness congregation has lodged an appeal with the charity tribunal against the Charity Commission's decision to open a statutory inquiry into safeguarding issues at the charity.

In June, the commission announced inquiries into the Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and the religion's governing body in the UK, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain, amid concerns about safeguarding and whether trustees have complied with charity law.

The regulator first looked into the Manchester congregation after revelations came to light in May that a former trustee of the charity, who served nine months in prison for the indecent assault of two girls, was allowed to question his victims in front of a congregation of elders after his release.

A spokesman for the Watch Tower said at the time the inquiries were announced that there would be appeals against both. An appeal was lodged last week in the name of the six trustees of the Manchester-based congregation, according to an update to the tribunal register of cases, published online yesterday.

The same spokesman said today that the Watch Tower would also appeal against the inquiry opened into it, either in the tribunal or elsewhere. "At the moment we're looking at what our legal position is, and we're considering whether to bring a judicial review in the High Court," he said.

Appeals against the opening of statutory inquiries are becoming more frequent – this is the fifth review application received by the tribunal so far this year, compared with two in 2013, none in 2012 and one in 2011, according to the register of cases.

Islamic law is adopted by British legal chiefs

Solicitors told how to draw up Sharia-style wills penalising widows and non-believers

The Telegraph (22.03.2014) - Islamic law is to be effectively enshrined in the British legal system for the first time under guidelines for solicitors on drawing up "Sharia compliant" wills.

Under ground-breaking guidance, produced by The Law Society, High Street solicitors will be able to write Islamic wills that deny women an equal share of inheritances and exclude unbelievers altogether.

The documents, which would be recognised by Britain's courts, will also prevent children born out of wedlock – and even those who have been adopted – from being counted as legitimate heirs.

Anyone married in a church, or in a civil ceremony, could be excluded from succession under Sharia principles, which recognise only Muslim weddings for inheritance purposes.

Nicholas Fluck, president of The Law Society, said the guidance would promote "good practice" in applying Islamic principles in the British legal system.

Some lawyers, however, described the guidance as "astonishing", while campaigners warned it represented a major step on the road to a "parallel legal system" for Britain's Muslim communities.

Baroness Cox, a cross-bench peer leading a Parliamentary campaign to protect women from religiously sanctioned discrimination, including from unofficial Sharia courts in Britain, said it was a "deeply disturbing" development and pledged to raise it with ministers.

"This violates everything that we stand for," she said. "It would make the Suffragettes turn in their graves."

The guidance, quietly published this month and distributed to solicitors in England and Wales, details how wills should be drafted to fit Islamic traditions while being valid under British law.

It suggests deleting or amending standard legal terms and even words such as "children" to ensure that those deemed "illegitimate" are denied any claim over the inheritance.

It recommends that some wills include a declaration of faith in Allah which would be drafted at a local mosque, and hands responsibility for drawing up some papers to Sharia courts.

The guidance goes on to suggest that Sharia principles could potentially overrule British practices in some disputes, giving examples of areas that would need to be tested in English courts.

Currently, Sharia principles are not formally addressed by or included in Britain's laws.

However, a network of Sharia courts has grown up in Islamic communities to deal with disputes between Muslim families.

A few are officially recognised tribunals, operating under the Arbitration Act.

They have powers to set contracts between parties, mainly in commercial disputes, but also to deal with issues such as domestic violence, family disputes and inheritance battles.

But many more unofficial Sharia courts are also in operation.

Parliament has been told of a significant network of more informal Sharia tribunals and "councils", often based in mosques, dealing with religious divorces and even child custody matters in line with religious teaching.

They offer "mediation" rather than adjudication, although some hearings are laid out like courts with religious scholars or legal experts sitting in a manner more akin to judges than counsellors.

One study estimated that there were now around 85 Sharia bodies operating in Britain. But the new Law Society guidance represents the first time that an official legal body has recognised the legitimacy of some Sharia principles.

It opens the way for non-Muslim lawyers in High Street firms to offer Sharia will drafting services. The document sets out crucial differences between Sharia inheritance laws and Western traditions.

It explains how, in Islamic custom, inheritances are divided among a set list of heirs determined by ties of kinship rather than named individuals. It acknowledges the possibility of people having multiple marriages.

"The male heirs in most cases receive double the amount inherited by a female heir of the same class," the guidance says. "Non-Muslims may not inherit at all, and only Muslim marriages are recognised.

Similarly, a divorced spouse is no longer a Sharia heir, as the entitlement depends on a valid Muslim marriage existing at the date of death. This means you should amend or delete some standard will clauses."

It advises lawyers to draft special exclusions from the Wills Act 1837, which allows gifts to pass to the children of an heir who has died, because this is not recognised in Islamic law.

Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, said: "This guidance marks a further stage in the British legal establishment's undermining of democratically determined human rights-compliant law in favour of religious law from another era and another culture. British equality law is more comprehensive in scope and remedies than any elsewhere in the world. Instead of protecting it, The Law Society seems determined to sacrifice the progress made in the last 500 years."

Lady Cox said: "Everyone has freedom to make their own will and everyone has freedom to let those wills reflect their religious beliefs. But to have an organisation such as The Law Society seeming to promote or encourage a policy which is inherently gender discriminatory in a way which will have very serious implications for women and possibly for children is a matter of deep concern."

HRWF Footnote: The Law Society's effort to integrate Islamic principles into the British legal system is indeed worrying. Trying to implement Sharia is ever a slippery affair. When it is done in ways that conflict with established norms of civil law, it should be vigorously opposed.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. the United Kingdom

Religion Law Blog (04.03.2014) - The European Court of Human Rights in [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints v. the United Kingdom](#) (also in [PDF](#)) has unanimously dismissed a case brought by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often called the Mormon Church) claiming a breach of [Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights](#)

The case related to the issue of Rate Relief for one of the two LDS Temples in Britain, namely the one in Preston, Lancashire. A Temple is considered, by the LDS Church to be the house of the Lord and one of the holiest places on earth. Ceremonies or "ordinances" held at the temple carry profound theological significance to Mormons, who believe as a tenet of their faith that only the worthy may be admitted. Only the most devout members of the applicant Church, who hold a current "recommend", are entitled to enter the temples. According to para 7 of the Judgment the right to enter a Temple is explained by the Church as follows:

"WORTHY TO ENTER

You must possess a current recommend to be admitted to the temple ... Only those who are worthy should go to the temple ...

The interview for a temple recommend is conducted privately between the bishop and the Church member concerned. Here the member is asked searching questions about his or her personal conduct, worthiness and loyalty to the Church and its officers. The person must certify that he is morally clean and keeping the Word of Wisdom, paying a full tithing [approximately 10% of income to be paid to the Church], living in harmony with the teachings of the Church and not maintaining any affiliation or sympathy with apostate groups ...

THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING A TEMPLE RECOMMEND IS A BLESSING"

The standards required in order to be granted a recommend include honesty, eschewing abusive conduct, attention to family duties, marital fidelity, the adoption of healthy lifestyle practices and, for divorcees, full compliance with support orders and other legal obligations.

The specific case concerned the temple at Preston, where congregational services are attended by on average 950 people a week. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, a valuation officer must compile and maintain a local rating list for his or her area. Premises included on the list are liable for the payment of business rates. Premises used for charitable purposes are entitled to charity business rates relief, which cuts the amount of rates payable by 80%. Places of "public religious worship" are wholly exempt from the tax. In 1998 the Preston temple was listed as a building used for charitable purpose and therefore retained a liability to pay only 20% rates, but it was refused the statutory tax exemption reserved for places of "public religious worship". Other buildings of the Church such as its various Chapels are open to the public and attract the normal 100% rates relief.

On 5 March 2001 the Church applied to have the temple removed from the rating list, claiming the benefit of the exemption for places of "public religious worship". On 21 October 2004 the Lancashire Valuation Tribunal granted the application for appeal and determined the temple to be exempt under the statutory provision. On 14 December 2005 the Lands Tribunal overturned that decision. The Church appealed unsuccessfully to the Court of Appeal and then appealed to the House of Lords.

In that hearing [Gallagher \(Valuation Officer\) v. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints \[2008\] UKHL 56](#) the Church argued for the first time that refusal of Rates Relief amounted to a breach of Article 9 but the House of Lords unanimously dismissed the appeal holding, on the basis of an earlier judgment (**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints v. Henning [1964] AC 420**), that as a matter of domestic law a place of "public religious worship" must be one that was open to the general public. (NB: *The Henning case had concerned the other LDS Temple in Surrey*)

The Government in its arguments to the ECHR did not accept that the LDS Church was in any different position in relation to the 1988 Act than any other religious organisation. The rule was of general application and concerned only the use made of the building; it did not discriminate on the basis of religious belief. Any of the Mormon places of worship, such as chapels and stake centres, that were open to the public, had the benefit of rates the exemption. The Government pointed out as an example that where Church of England churches were run by closed orders or as college chapels which were not open to the public they too did not get rates relief,

The LDS Church put in a very interesting argument summarised in para 21 of the judgment

Temple worship, by its very nature as understood by its believers, required that only those who voluntarily lived by the kinds of commitments made in the temple should be allowed to participate. This was not a case of worship being made private for the purposes of being exclusive or to provide private benefit; it was because the very nature of the worship as understood by its believers required privacy to promote the sacred character of the worship. The relevant analogy would be to insist that the tax exemption be denied to space devoted to confessionals or to the area behind the iconostasis in Orthodox churches. Just as an invitation to the general public to enter these spaces would disrupt sacred practices, so the nature of temple worship would be destroyed if there were a general requirement that the public be able to sit in.

However the argument was unsuccessful the Court fully accepting the reasoning of the House of Lords. The case fell within the margin of appreciation given to individual states and the UK was entitled to decide that tax reliefs should only be given to places of religious worship which were open to the public and so provided "public benefit".

Full judgment available at

<http://www.strasbourgconsortium.org/common/document.view.php?docId=5477>
