

LAICISM

## UK and Poland, religious instruction under attack

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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The social-labourists of the United Kingdom and the liberal-socialists of Poland are discriminating against the Catholic religion and attacking the Christian memory of their countries, in the name of a suicidal secularism and an alleged 'non-discrimination' that marginalises, penalises and discriminates only against Christian believers and in particular Catholics.

**The new Education Secretary of the British Labour government** has been asked in recent days to seriously address the issue of Religious Education (RE) in schools. The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) has **warned** the government that 'religious education is the most neglected subject in terms of resources', despite a growing interest on the part of pupils and an increase in pupils aspiring to obtain the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**) in Religious Studies (Rs), specific courses to be able to later also teach religion. Earlier this year, **Ofsted**, the public agency overseeing school education, warned that a number of schools in England would fail to meet the legal requirement to teach religious education in all classes.

**English law requires that the curriculum provides** for religious instruction in state-funded schools, while not specifically teaching a religion, must reflect the fact that 'religious traditions in Britain are primarily Christian'.

**Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Sir Martyn Oliver**, had already reminded us last **April** of the need for a 'robust religious education curriculum' for the cultural development of pupils and the future cohesion of the country. The increased interest of families and pupils in religious instruction, and the Labour government's corresponding silence in hiring new religious education teachers, prompted various associations to launch an appeal to ask the executive for a **National Plan** that would enhance religious instruction and teachers in this subject. **Bridget Phillipson**, Education Secretary, pledged last July to recruit 6,500 new teachers by 2024, but made no mention of increasing the number of religious education teachers, whose recruitment has been at a standstill since 2011. The Labour government's plans are well outlined in the **election programme**: 'Increased access to sports and arts education, along with a strong literacy and numeracy core, plus the introduction of a new focus on digital skills, speaking and listening skills'.

**Religious instruction**, so necessary if it emphasised the country's Christian roots, appears, however, neither tolerated by the new social-liberal Labourism, nor by that Islamist part of the electorate that allowed Prime Minister Keir Starmer to win with a large majority.

**Donald Tusk's Poland is striding along the same perilous path**, that of writing a new page in the country's history, cutting off its religious roots and traditions in the name of an abused freedom, secularism and non-discrimination of others.

**In the Polish educational system**, religious instruction usually consists of teaching the Catholic catechism, with teachers and programmes chosen by the Church, but the lessons are hosted and financed by State schools, and are widely attended even if they remain optional. On 22 March, the Minister of Education, Barbara Nowacka, had removed the marks obtained in religion lessons from pupils' final grades. According to the Tusk government's August amendments, when fewer than seven pupils express a wish to receive religious instruction, schools would be authorised to reduce religion classes by merging them with pupils from different year groups, with the danger of marginalising religious instruction and reducing the number of teachers.

**In mid-August, the Catholic Church and the Polish Ecumenical Council**, which represents minority Christian denominations, had asked the President of the Supreme Court, Małgorzata Manowska, to submit a motion to the Constitutional Tribunal to verify the constitutionality of the changes. On 30 August, the constitutional judges issued an interim order suspending the government's planned changes to the organisation of religious instruction in schools. In recent days, the President of the Republic, Andrzej Duda, has warned the governing liberal-socialist coalition that removing the teaching of religion from school education 'would remove an inalienable part of being Polish' and of the nation's historical and popular traditions, which cannot be renounced.