

COMMENT

Crusader Mentality Resurfaces with a Vengeance

THE realisation by the Muslims that their sojourn in Europe may be a very long one has coincided with the upliftment of their moral spirits by resurgent Islam. The Christian-colonial thesis that Islam has finally been subjugated by western imperialism had been thrust upon many a Muslim mind. The unfolding of world history since the turn of the century left little room to challenge this thesis convincingly. However, over the last 30 years Muslims have slowly but perceptibly turned the tide back and the decisive results were seen in the late 1970s. As a direct consequence, the worldview of Islam is gradually becoming a serious rival to the dominant western one.

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In Britain, the effect of all these factors is most readily observable in the demand for Islamic schools for Muslim children. To be sure, tension has always existed between Muslim parents and the British educational establishment. Muslim mores about dress, dietary habits, and the status of women are radically different from those of the host community. In the 60s, the Muslims were forced to comply with the dictum: "When in Rome do as the Romans do." In any case, the superiority complex of the British had little time for any other alternative way of looking at things. The permissive age shook the British establishment and there emerged the liberals and humanists who argued for equal status for all cultures and for Britain to be seen as a multi-cultural society. The 70s thus saw a marginally more relaxed posture by the educational establishment; some minor Muslim demands were accommodated.

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By the time this latitude had worked itself into the demand for separate schools for Muslims, however, the liberals and the humanists had retreated full circle. Today they are the most vehement opponents of accommodating Muslim demands. Indeed, so opposed they are to separate Muslim schools, that they are ready to accommodate all the hitherto 'impossible' Muslim demands into the

present state educational structure. By this ploy they have divided the Muslim community in Bradford and are in the process of repeating the exercise in the London Borough of Brent. The fact that they are now prepared to concede all the demands of the Muslims, bar the composition of the syllabus, is evidence itself of the source of the opposition.

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The main reason given, once stripped of the rhetoric, is that whilst the Jews and the Christians, who do have separate state-funded schools in Britain, do not have a worldview other than that of their own creation – i.e. western capitalism – the Muslims have an independent and comprehensive alternative which could in time threaten western hegemony globally. The radical anti-western stance of revivalist Islam is adduced as a supporting argument. In general, it is argued that the Muslim view of history, of geography, of science, to name a few areas, is likely to be diametrically opposed to the prevailing Eurocentric conceptions of these disciplines. If these views are taught to Muslim children, it is argued, the level of conflict in British society will increase and will make for less harmony. Thus, the argument runs, whether true or not, Muslim views must not be allowed to be taught in the UK. Or in the words of *The Times* of London, other communities like the Hindus can be integrated into British society but Islam is indigestible!

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The debate in the UK has just begun, but it is interesting to see how flimsy is the veneer of 'socialism', 'humanism' and 'liberalism'. At the same time, much can be learned about the strength of the crusader mentality, even in circles where religion itself has become a dirty word. Yet for Muslims, an Islamic educational platform is vital if the worldview of Islam is to be contemporarised. In this respect, if the Muslims in the UK are successful, they may provide vital elixir to the moribund neo-colonial educational establishments across the breadth of the Muslim world.

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