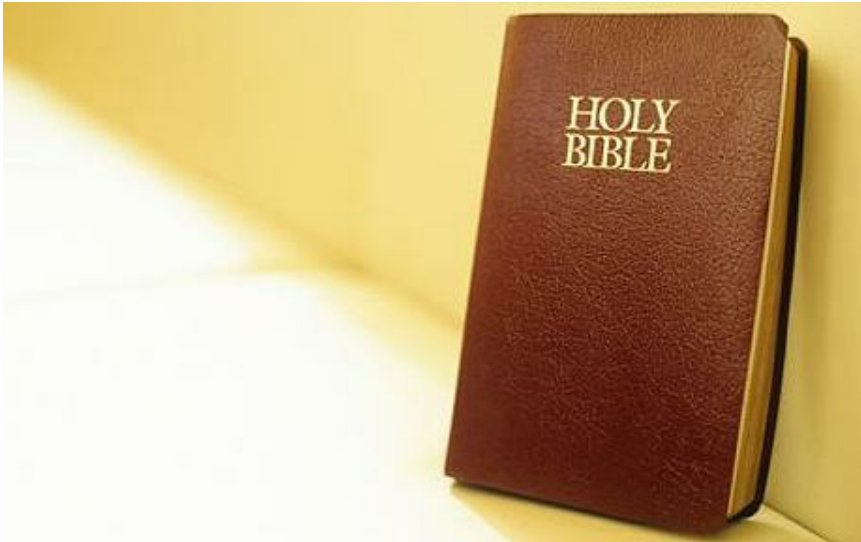


Bible moved to library top shelf over inequality fears

Librarians have been advised to move the Bible to the top shelves to appease religious concerns in the Islamic community.

By Lucy Cockcroft

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Officials have issued guidance that libraries should keep all holy books, including the Bible, on the top shelves Photo: GETTY

Muslims have complained that the Koran is often displayed on the lower shelves, which is deemed offensive as many believe the holy book should be placed above "commonplace things".

Now library officials in one city have been told to keep all holy books, including the Bible, on the top shelves in the interests of equality.

It has caused concern from Christian charities that this will put the Bible out of the reach and sight of many people.

The situation was brought to light in guidance published by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, a quango answering to Culture Secretary Andy Burnham, on how to handle controversial materials.

It said some Muslims in Leicester had moved copies of the Koran to the top shelves of libraries, because they believe it is an insult to display it in a low position.

The city's librarians consulted the Federation of Muslim Organisations and were advised that all religious texts should be kept on the top shelf to ensure equality.

A short case study on the situation has been written into the appendix of the guidance, available on the MLA website.

It states: "Some libraries in Leicester have received complaints about the Koran not being placed on the top shelves in libraries. Some customers go along the shelves and place the Koran so it is shelved higher than other books.

"This action arises from the practice in many Muslim homes of the Koran being placed on a high shelf above commonplace things, as it is the word of God.

"The authority consulted the Federation of Muslim Organisations in Leicester about this matter, and they advised that all religious texts should be kept on a top shelf together.

"This meant that no offence is caused, as the scriptures of all the major faiths are given respect in this way, but none is higher than any other."

Some critics have expressed concern that the books will now just be treated as objects to revere rather than books to read.

Robert Whelan of the Civitas think-tank told The Daily Mail: "Libraries and museums are not places of worship. They should not be run in accordance with particular religious beliefs.

"This is violating the principles of librarianship and it is part of an insidious trend.

"One of the central planks of the Protestant Reformation was that everybody should have access to the Bible."

Simon Calvert of the Christian Institute said: "It is disappointing if the policy of libraries is dictated by the practices of one group.

"It is particularly disappointing if this is done to put the scriptures beyond reach.

"I hope there will be a rethink. I understand that Muslims revere their own text, but in public libraries there should not be a policy of putting religious texts out of reach."

Inayat Bunglawala, of the Engage think tank, which encourages Muslims to play a greater role in public life, said that there should not be a "one size fits all" rule.

He said: "If Muslims wish to see the Koran placed on a higher shelf, and library rules say it should be there, then that is a welcome and considerate gesture.

"But one size does not fit all. If Christians do not want to see the Bible treated in the same way, I do not see why it has to be dealt with the same."

An MLA spokesman said there were no rules to say other libraries must follow suit with Leicester.

He said: "Different libraries can legitimately treat religious texts in different ways – there is not a one size fits all solution and no group has asked for there to be one. The key is to show understanding, respect and equality to all local library users."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/4687077/Bible-put-on-top-shelf-in-move-to-appease-Muslims.html>