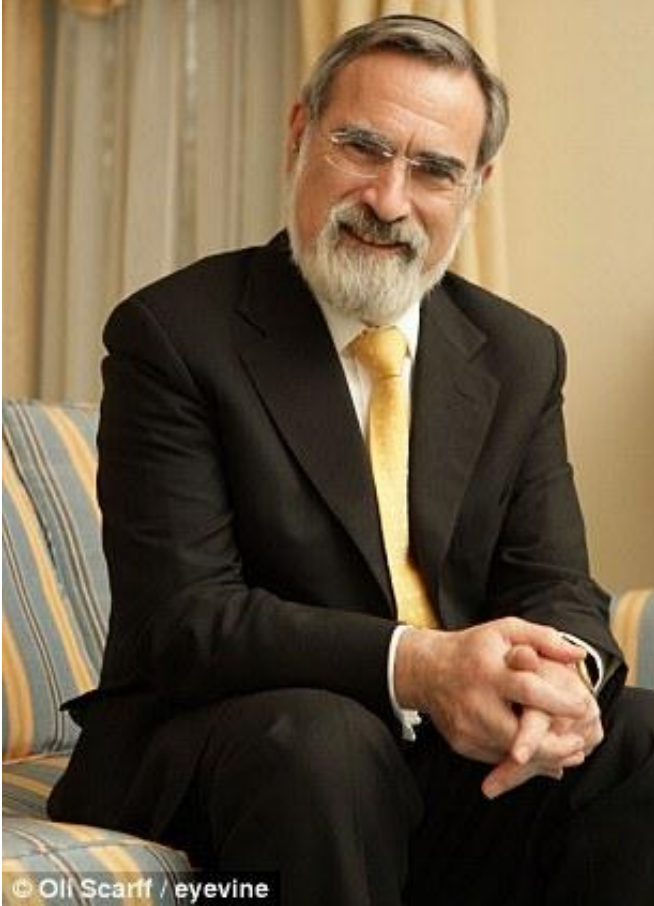


## Secular UK is losing the plot: Chief Rabbi warns society is 'breaking down through loss of faith'

- **Lord Sacks says society is failing to protect institutions such as marriage**
- **Chief Rabbi insists politicians are only partly responsible for the decline**
- **Claims permissive attitudes of the Sixties have left marriage in 'disarray'**

By Jason Groves



Warning: Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks said society was failing to protect institutions such as marriage

Britain is 'losing the plot' as it becomes more secular and less trusting, the Chief Rabbi has warned. Lord Sacks, who retires on Sunday, said society was failing to protect institutions such as marriage – with grave consequences.

'I think we're losing the plot actually,' he said. 'I think we haven't really noticed what's happened in Britain. 'When you begin to lose faith and society becomes very, very secularised, you see a breakdown of institutions, whether they are financial or economic, or marriage as an institution.

'Then you ask "Why have they broken down?", and you arrive at one word, which is trust.' Last week Lord Sacks warned that the Government had 'not done enough' to support marriage.

He urged ministers to finally introduce a promised tax break for married couples, and said mothers who stayed at home to raise their children deserved more recognition.

However, yesterday he added that politicians were only partly responsible for the decline of marriage. He claimed the permissive attitudes of the Sixties had left marriage in 'disarray' and children worse-off. 'It's not the fault of one government or another, and it's not even the fault of government,' he said. 'It's the fault of what we call culture, which is society talking to itself.'



New man: Lord Sacks will soon be succeeded by Ephraim Mirvis (pictured), the former Chief Rabbi of Ireland

Of the Sixties, he said: 'We were in that revolution, and at the time it seemed to be "all you need is love" and nothing else.

'We live to see, 50 years later, the full cost of that ... child poverty that has a lot to do with single- parent families.

### HOW THE WEB SPREADS HATE

The internet is fuelling intolerance and hatred, according to Lord Sacks. He said he has grown increasingly alarmed by how hate-filled material can be spread on social networks with apparent impunity.

The Chief Rabbi, who will continue to campaign on the issue after he retires next week, said the law should be extended to force internet service providers and the owners of social networks and other websites to remove material that would otherwise be classed as 'hate speech'.

He said: 'It's very difficult, but they do have to be vigilant, and they have to take hate speech off their websites as soon as they discover it.'

He stressed that he was not against new technology – Lord Sacks has his own Facebook and Twitter accounts – but highlighted the damaging effects of the anonymity available online. 'We are worried about the social media because you can post abusive comments without the person being in your physical presence,' he said. 'That anonymity and that distance mean that the internet is one of the great carriers of prejudice and paranoia, and I don't take it lightly.' Lord Sacks also said he remains opposed to gay marriage - but warned against 'whipping up prejudice' against homosexuals.

'No-one wants to lay a burden of guilt on anyone who bought into the cultural attitudes of the Sixties, but the fact is, their kids are suffering.'

Lord Sacks, who has been Chief Rabbi for 22 years, lamented the rise of selfishness, and called on politicians to work with faith groups to create a more caring country.

'Individualism is no way to build a society,' he said. 'If people work for the maximum possible benefit for themselves then we will not have trust in industry, in economics, in financial institutions; we will not see marriages last.' In wide-ranging interviews to mark his retirement, he also called for the Government to act now to tackle the housing crisis.

He said it was 'morally unacceptable' that many youngsters were no longer able to afford a home in the town where they work.

However, despite his warnings, he insisted he is 'full of hope' for the future – not least because of the popularity of faith schools.

He said many people shared his concerns about society, adding: 'It is why so many non-believing parents send their children to faith schools – they want their children to grow up with a strong moral sense.' Lord Sacks – who will be succeeded by Ephraim Mirvis, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland – also called for more action to tackle the persecution of Christian minorities in the Middle East. 'This is a story which is crying out for a public voice,' he said.