

# The Challenge of Islam in the UK

The increasing influence of Islam in the UK poses a challenge to the church. How should we respond? In this article I would like to review the current influence of Islam in the UK and discuss something about the beliefs and worldview of Muslims, before outlining some ways that the church can and should be responding.

## The Influence of Islam

### The fastest growing religion in the UK

At the last census in 2011, there were 2.7 million Muslims in the UK, or 4.8% of the population.<sup>1</sup> This has risen quite rapidly from only 105,000 in 1960.<sup>2</sup> The previous census in 2001 showed a Muslim population of 1.6 million. Islam was therefore the fastest growing religion in the UK over the ten-year period, showing growth of nearly 70%. Pew Research estimate that by 2030, Muslims will have reached 8% of the population.<sup>3</sup> Already, 8.1% of all school-age children are Muslim.<sup>4</sup> The name Muhammad, when allowing for spelling variants, has been the top boys' name for babies in Britain for five years running.<sup>5</sup>

### Segregation and lack of integration

The Policy Exchange report, 'Unsettled Belonging: A survey of Britain's Muslim communities', published in 2016, claimed to be the most extensive research of British Muslims ever conducted.<sup>6</sup> The report found that 53% of Muslims were born outside the UK, while 93% had parents born outside the UK. This demonstrates that much of the growth is occurring through immigration.

According to the report, 43% of Muslims support the introduction of Sharia law, broadly defined. Fifty three percent prefer to send their children to a school with strong 'Muslim values' and 44% said that schools should be able to insist on 'a hijab or niqab' in uniform, while 32% disagreed with this.

The government commissioned Dame Louise Casey to review integration in society. Her report was published in December 2016.<sup>7</sup> She found that there is indeed a problem in terms of integration of religious minorities. In a striking statement, she said: 'None of the 800 or more people that we met, nor any of the two hundred plus written submissions to the review, said there wasn't a problem to solve.'<sup>8</sup>

In many ways it is encouraging that there is widespread recognition of the problem. This also means that that it is becoming more politically acceptable to say so. Casey articulated something of a cultural clash in some of our communities:

*I also found... cultural and religious practices in communities that are not only holding some of our citizens back but run contrary to British values and sometimes our laws. Time and time again I found it was women and children who were the targets of these regressive practices. And, too often, leaders and institutions were not doing enough to stand up against them and protect those who were vulnerable.'*<sup>9</sup>

She made clear that many institutions are too accommodating out of fear of being labelled Islamophobic:

*Too many public institutions, national and local, state and non-state, have gone so far to accommodate*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ijesd.org/papers/29-D438.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-europe/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCB-Muslims-in-Numbers-infographic-final.jpg>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2017/09/20/muhammad-top-english-baby-name-fifth-year-running/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/unsettled-belonging-a-survey-of-britains-muslim-communities/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>

<sup>8</sup> Casey Review, p5.

<sup>9</sup> Casey Review, p5.

*diversity and freedom of expression that they have ignored or even condoned regressive, divisive and harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded racist or Islamophobic... At its most serious, it might mean public sector leaders ignoring harm or denying abuse.*<sup>10</sup>

She highlighted Islam in particular, and said, 'We found a growing sense of grievance among sections of the Muslim population, and a stronger sense of identification with the plight of the 'Ummah', or global Muslim community.'<sup>11</sup>

Trevor Phillips, former head of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, said last year that 'the integration of Muslims will probably be the hardest task we have ever faced'.<sup>12</sup> This is a remarkably strong statement, and all the more significant coming as it does from the man who claims to have commissioned the report that first introduced the term 'Islamophobia' to Britain twenty years ago.

The problem is exacerbated by concentration of Muslims in certain urban areas. The 2011 census showed that major cities such as Bradford, Luton, Slough, and Birmingham all have Muslim populations over 20%, compared with 5% for the overall population of the nation.<sup>13</sup> The Casey Review said that 'people of Muslim faith live in increasing and greater concentrations (relative to other minority ethnic and faith groups) in particular local electoral wards in certain areas in the north, the Midlands and London'.<sup>14</sup> This creates segregated communities where some Muslims have little interaction with people from other communities, and where children attend Muslim-dominated schools. The Casey review cited a survey of pupils at a non-faith secondary school, which found that pupil estimates of the Asian population of Britain ranged from 50% to 90% (the actual figure is 7%).<sup>15</sup>

### **Cultural influence**

Islam has a disproportionate influence on our culture, given that it represents only 5% of the population. Multiple mainstream supermarkets and restaurant chains sell halal meat, often without labelling it. London hosts an Islamic fashion show.<sup>16</sup> Debenhams recently became the first major department store to sell Islamic clothing.<sup>17</sup> Posters proclaiming 'Subhan Allah' meaning 'Glory to Allah' appeared on hundreds of buses this year.<sup>18</sup> In education, exam boards have rescheduled exams to avoid clashing with Ramadan for the next three years.<sup>19</sup> Islamic schools have been found to contain extremist material.<sup>20</sup> Several of our leading universities have accepted significant Islamic funding, ceding influence to Islam in tertiary education.<sup>21</sup>

Sa far as religious influence goes, this is most symbolically demonstrated with the fact that many church buildings have been converted to mosques. Indeed, the mosque attended by the Manchester Arena attacker was previously a Methodist church. Perhaps even more shockingly, the Muslim call to prayer was chanted in Gloucester Cathedral earlier this year,<sup>22</sup> and in St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow, the Qur'an was recited during a communion service.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Casey Review, p16.

<sup>11</sup> Casey Review, p13.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/my-sons-living-hell-j72t7fppc>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rft-table-ks209ew.xls>

<sup>14</sup> Casey Review, p23.

<sup>15</sup> Casey Review, p49.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2016/may/29/london-show-reflects-global-boom-in-islamic-fashion>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/debenhams-hijab-muslim-clothing-women-uk-department-store-religion-a7575306.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslim-charity-islamic-relief-allah-is-great-posters-buses-islam-positive-light-a7019396.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/06/popular-exams-in-uk-to-be-rescheduled-to-avoid-ramadan>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3911470/The-extremist-schools-t-close-Four-Muslim-colleges-ordered-shut-Government-use-courts-defy-ministers.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.meforum.org/6205/foreign-muslim-funding-western-universities>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/756360/islamic-call-to-prayer-historic-british-gloucester-cathedral-outrage>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/bishop.michael.nazir.ali.condemns.koran.reading.at.anglican.cathedral.epiphany.service/103716.htm>

The BBC reported in 2015 that there had been more than 11,000 recorded cases of 'honour crime' in the last five years.<sup>24</sup> Earlier this year, a Glasgow shopkeeper was killed, effectively for being the wrong type of Muslim.<sup>25</sup> He had been granted asylum when he moved from Pakistan in 1998. It was expected that Scotland would be a safe place for him and his family. The Crown Prosecution Service has been accused by a whistle-blower of being afraid to tackle honour crimes for fear of causing unrest in Asian communities.<sup>26</sup>

In prisons, Muslims are disproportionately represented, being 14.5% of the prison population.<sup>27</sup> A government report found that prison Imams are routinely distributing extremist literature amongst prisoners.<sup>28</sup> There are also reports of prisoner-run 'sharia courts' carrying out various types of corporal punishment.<sup>29</sup> The net result is that inmates leave prison more radical than when they went in, with many converting to Islam in prison.<sup>30</sup>

### Jihadists

British intelligence services say they are monitoring over 3,000 home-grown Islamist extremists who are willing to carry out attacks in Britain.<sup>31</sup> Another 20,000 have featured in previous inquiries, and are considered to pose a 'residual risk'. Some of those who carried out attacks this year were in that latter group. Police and intelligence services have some 500 live anti-terror operations running. Some 850 British Muslims have travelled to support or fight for Jihadist groups in Syria or Iraq.<sup>32</sup> Another 600 have been stopped on the way.<sup>33</sup> The mother of one of these fighters claimed that her son had been radicalised in just seventeen days in London after attending sermons at local mosques.<sup>34</sup> It is not physically possible for intelligence services to monitor all these people, given that MI5 only employ around 4,000 people.<sup>35</sup> It takes three teams of six people, plus support staff, to monitor one person round the clock.<sup>36</sup>

Home-grown radicals are bad enough. There are also overseas-grown radicals that we are importing. The head of the Armed Forces has said that Jihadists are 'hiding in plain sight' among migrants.<sup>37</sup> One foster mother was shocked to find that the supposed 12-year-old boy she fostered was actually a 21-year-old trained Jihadist, skilled with a rifle, and with Taliban and child abuse material on his phone.<sup>38</sup>

### Sharia law

It has been estimated that there are over 85 Sharia courts operating in the UK.<sup>39</sup> This has created a de-facto parallel legal system for people in some communities. Women, in particular, may face tremendous family pressure to use Sharia courts, and may lack both the necessary English skills and a proper understanding of their rights under British law to otherwise enjoy the protections that would be afforded them through the English court system.<sup>40</sup> In addition to family pressure, refusal to settle a dispute in a Sharia forum could lead to threats and intimidation, being labelled as an unbeliever or being ostracised from the community.<sup>41</sup> Machteld Zee has exposed how many of those promoting the operation of Sharia councils in the UK are actually fundamentalists who want to turn the UK into an Islamic state, imposing Sharia law on all citizens.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33424644>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/07/muslim-man-admits-murdering-shopkeeper-asad-shah-who-wished-belo/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/07/cps-afraid-to-tackle-honour-crimes/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.itv.com/news/2016-04-19/muslim-jail-chaplains-distributing-islamist-literature-leaked-report-reveals/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36419430>.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-36437686/sharia-courts-in-british-prisons>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/the-jihadi-training-camp-right-in-the-heart-of-london-a3249941.html>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/7c55b0b8-4253-11e7-9319-8b08a5454daf>.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/15/foreign-secretary-600-uk-citizens-isis-syria-philip-hammond>.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/23/jihadi-johns-fourth-beatle-unmasked-as-refugee-given-shelter-in/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/faq>.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22718000>.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/14/jihadists-hiding-plain-sight-among-migrants-head-armed-forces/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3863392/Foster-mother-discovers-12-year-old-Afghan-refugee-orphan-cared-21-year-old-jihadi.html>

<sup>39</sup> Denis MacEoin, *Sharia Law or 'One Law for All?'*, Civitas, June 2009, p69.

<sup>40</sup> *Sharia Law in Britain: A Threat to One Law for All & Equal Rights, One Law for All*, June 2010, p16.

<sup>41</sup> Baroness Caroline Cox, *A Parallel World: Confronting the abuse of many Muslim women in Britain Today*, Bow Group, 2015, p9.

<sup>42</sup> Machteld Zee, *Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism & Sharia Councils*, Eleven International Publishing

Sharia law is inherently discriminatory against both women and non-Muslims; in these courts a woman's voice counts half as much as a man's voice. Some Sharia court judges have argued for child marriage, or say that 'a husband should not be questioned why he hit his wife'.<sup>43</sup>

In 2014, the UK became the first non-Islamic country to issue a sovereign Sharia bond. There are now over twenty banks offering Sharia compliant products in the UK, with over 100,000 retail customers.<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere I have outlined the various problems with Islamic finance, which is based on a modern, radical interpretation of the Qur'an and is promoted by fundamentalists.<sup>45</sup> The UK, nevertheless, remains committed to London becoming a centre for Islamic finance.

## Beliefs of Muslims

Rather than discussing the five pillars of Islam, or the six articles of faith, which can easily be found on the internet if you are not familiar with them, I want to look at some worldview ideas proposed by the more fundamentalist end of the spectrum in the UK.

### Problems in society

Britain is seen as failing morally and spiritually; immorality is on public display in our culture, on TV, in films, in the music industry; socially, family breakdown is evident; culturally there is a loss of national identity, economically, there are many issues and criticisms that can be made; spiritually, Christianity is seen as weak and in decline: only 5-7% of the population regularly attend church. The critique is made by Muslims that our society is obviously failing in many ways and we, as Christians, would agree.

Where we would differ would be in the diagnosis of the reasons for the failure of our society. The Islamic view would be that Christianity is to blame for the present situation. Britain is understood to be basically a 'Christian culture', but Christianity has failed to provide a moral foundation for our society; Christians lack confidence in their beliefs and cannot define or defend their faith well; Christianity is failing to attract people to church, whereas Islam is rapidly growing in this country with many converts from Christianity to Islam. Christians are seen as living no differently to unbelievers, lacking moral integrity, with similar levels of family breakdown. In any case, as Muslims see it, Christianity is false and based on a corrupted scripture.

### The attraction of Islam

The solution, therefore, is very clear to the Muslim mindset: Britain and British people should accept Islam as the foundation for society. It is useful to understand the attraction of Islam in this context.<sup>46</sup> Islam is viewed as a moral religion. Alcohol is not allowed, nor is adultery, stealing or various other crimes; women cover themselves up, rather than flaunt their sexuality; there are clear penalties for moral violations, both in this life and the next. Christianity, by contrast, is seen as relatively immoral, especially when you compare Christian cultures with Islamic cultures.

Islam is also a 'simple' religion. It has a simple creed and a simple theology of 'one God'. There are no complications like a Trinity, or an incarnation, or the atonement, or the ascension. There is a clear morality: good deeds are weighed against bad; it is fatalistic. Islam is thus easy: It is the easiest religion in the world to join (and the hardest to leave!). There are only five things to do: the five pillars of Islam. It is very clear whether you have done what is required or not. Islam is recent; it came after Christianity. It has built-in defences against Christianity and being more recent implies that it is better, newer, improved and more relevant relative to other religions.

Islam is also a masculine religion: It is a religion for men and by men; Islam attracts men. Christianity is

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(2016), pp111-118.

<sup>43</sup> Machteld Zee, *Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism & Sharia Councils*, Eleven International Publishing (2016), p118.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.thecityuk.com/news/global-market-for-islamic-financial-services-up-12-to-2trillion/>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.christianconcern.com/islamicfinance>

<sup>46</sup> For more on this see: David Pawson, *The Challenge of Islam to Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).

often seen as effeminate and weak; there are more women than men in most churches. Islam is understood to be a reverent religion: Muslims pray five times a day; Christians are thought to only pray on Sundays; Muslims kneel and bow down before God; church worship often lacks such obvious reverence. In a consumeristic society people will choose the religion that they prefer. Islam can appear to be better and more attractive than Christianity in all these ways.

## Surveys

Surveys have revealed some striking information about the beliefs of British Muslims. The Policy Exchange survey of 2016 found that 96% believe that the attacks of 9/11 were not carried out by Al Qaeda.<sup>47</sup> The vast majority believe that there is some other explanation, and this is commonly understood in Muslim communities.

The ICM survey of 2015 found that 7% of Muslims support the objective to create an Islamic state.<sup>48</sup> Only 3% said that they support the way in which Isis is establishing a caliphate. This is a small minority of British Muslims, but 3% of around three million Muslims is 90,000 people supporting Isis. When it comes to free speech, the same survey found that 78% believed that no publication should have the right to publish pictures of Mohammed. This rose to 87% when talking about the right to publish pictures making fun of Mohammed. Muslims are thus very intolerant of criticism of their religion and do not support free speech in this respect.

The survey asked whether violence is justified in a number of situations. As many as 24% sympathised with violence by organised groups to protect their religion; 18% sympathised with violence against those who mock Mohammed. Sympathy with terrorist actions for political protest was much lower at 4% but 31% agreed that it is acceptable for British Muslims to keep more than one wife, even though that is illegal in this country. Also, 35% believed that Jewish people have too much power in Britain.

## How can the church respond?

Islam poses a challenge to the church in the UK. It is growing rapidly, and gaining influence throughout our society. So how can the church respond?

I would like to outline 'five pillars' of responding to Islam:

*Firstly, prayer:* Islam is a spiritual entity; this is a spiritual battle. The Bible tells us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). Prayer is key. We need to clearly understand that Muslims are redeemable, whereas Islam is not and pray accordingly. Islam works against Christianity and the gospel. All of our interaction and responses to Islam need to be grounded in prayer.

*Secondly, love:* Jesus said that we should even love our enemies (Mt. 5:44). Not that Muslims are our enemies, but Islam is an enemy of Christ. Our responses to Islam need to be motivated with love – love for Muslims, and love for others. We cannot respond to anger and hatred in any other way than with love. We also need to show that we as a church will love and support those who at great personal cost are willing to leave Islam to follow Christ. This is why we at Christian Concern set up our Safe Haven<sup>49</sup> project to show exactly that kind of love to converts.

*Thirdly, confront:* It is a mistake to see confrontation as unloving. Jesus confronted the Pharisees in the most forthright manner (Matthew 23). Paul confronted the Athenians with the futility of their idolatry (Acts 17:22-34). Paul even publicly confronted Peter over his compromising behaviour (Gal. 2:11-14). Islam is an ideology that needs to be confronted. Paul said: 'We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Cor. 10:5). Islam sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Its truth claims need to be confidently

<sup>47</sup> <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/unsettled-belonging-a-survey-of-britains-muslim-communities/>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.icmunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Muslims-full-suite-data-plus-topline.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.safe-haven.org.uk/>

confronted; the church needs to build up resources for Christians to confidently challenge and confront Islam in our society at every level. Whether it is with friends and neighbours, or in the public square and in the media, we lovingly confront Muslims with the truth claims of Christianity and desire that they should experience the love of Christ.

*Fourthly, expose:* Paul said: 'Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them' (Eph. 5:11). There are aspects of Islam that need to be exposed. Islam is an intolerant religion. This does not mean that all Muslims are intolerant people. Rather, it means that the ideology presented in the Qur'an and in the example of Muhammad is intolerant. It is also discriminatory against both women and non-Muslims; it advocates violence and cruel punishments; it seeks political power. These things need to be exposed. One way that we have done this is in producing a booklet outlining various problems with Islamic finance.<sup>50</sup> This exposes the real agenda behind Islamic finance and how it is based on a modern, radical interpretation of the Qur'an. Christians need to shine a light on things that are being done in the name of Islam to expose their true nature.

*Fifthly, resist:* The influence of Islam in our society needs to be resisted in law and in politics. Christians need to be actively involved in this kind of resistance. Amos said: 'Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts' (Amos 5:15). Christians should use our legal rights and freedoms to maintain and protect Christian freedoms. The great example of successful resistance was the campaign to stop the mega-mosque from being built in London for the 2012 Olympics. The original plans were for a building that could hold at least 40,000 worshippers, making it the largest place of worship in the whole of Europe.<sup>51</sup> The mosque was backed by Islamic group Tablighi Jamaat, who preach a conservative and separationist version of Islam. The mosque was successfully resisted with a campaign led by Alan Craig and a small group of others, which also garnered support from the local Muslim community.<sup>52</sup> Christian Concern supports Christian street preachers who are deemed to have offended people by insulting Islam, with a 100% success record in defending free-speech so far. We have also defended Christians who have lost their jobs for witnessing to Muslims. Baroness Cox has valiantly sought to resist the influence of Sharia courts through parliamentary bills. This kind of resistance needs to grow and gain wide support in the church as we seek to preserve our Christian freedoms.

Part of the challenge of Islam is that it is bold and unashamed in its approach. In this it can put to shame Christians who shy away from talking about our faith or proclaiming its relevance to society. In the end, the only effective response to radical Islam is radical Christianity. If more of us were radical, bold and unashamed about our faith, confident in confrontation and challenging Islam's claims, then many more Muslims would turn to Christianity. As it is, there are reports of churches baptising Muslim believers, on a regular basis in some cases. God appears to have chosen to use Islam to awaken the church. The question is, will we respond to this call?

*Tim Dieppe*

*Tim Dieppe is the Director of Islamic Affairs at Christian Concern, having previously been a fund manager for over twenty years.*

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.christianconcern.com/islamicfinance>.

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3632591/The-shadow-cast-by-a-mega-mosque.html>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.alansangle.com/?p=2017>.