

Vicar's letter, January 2011

2010 has seen me change my view of Islam. As I write this article we have learned that a suicide bomber who died yesterday in Sweden lived in Luton. Not so long ago Luton Muslims demonstrated against the return of bodies of servicemen killed in Afghanistan. Those people were free to go back to their mosques and homes, and free ultimately to spread the message of Islam so fatally connected to death and destruction.

Meanwhile also today in the news is the case of the American preacher Terry Jones – who once threatened to burn a copy of the Koran – invited to come and address a meeting of the English Defence League. Although nothing has yet been announced the chances of him coming are remote. He will almost certainly be barred like Geerd Wilders of the Netherlands was barred a year ago. The Government is at pains to prevent anyone saying what has become more and more the unspoken secret that we all know, namely that Islam and violence are somehow closely connected. The *British* (Neville Chamberlain) solution is to stop anybody saying this openly, to pretend that peace is here.

As chairman of the East London Three Faiths Forum for many years I have earnestly tried to build good relations, to listen and to be heard as I aired my concerns. I have wanted peace for our land and have seen the presence of so many Muslims as a fact, not to be ignored, rather as something to work with so that mutual respect and understanding can grow. I have never been a fan of multiculturalism as I see the culture of our land as British and Christian, but I have always seen the culture of this land as open for others to share provided they respect the core Christian-British culture. I have now come to the view that there is a vast number of Muslims, probably not far short of a third, who have no desire to appreciate or respect the core culture of this land. As a young Muslim man goes to college, joins the Islamic Society, desires to learn and develop his identity and faith, he will be led *inevitably* to hate the core British culture. This is dangerous, very very dangerous.

Melanie Philips, a journalist working for the Daily Mail and the BBC, wrote a book called *Londonistan*. She claimed that Britain has long been seen as a soft touch by Islamic extremists providing an environment where for fear of appearing racist the government tolerates activities that would not be tolerated anywhere else. Luton is a case in point. It is an environment that incubates suicide bombers, as was proved yesterday.

Working with the Three Faiths Forum I have met many kind hearted and good Muslims, people who are in no way a threat to our society, who pay taxes and contribute. The Head Imam of South Woodford Mosque is a case in point. He has an influence for good. Sadly I do not think his influence, and those like him, is enough. Among those Muslims who have a commendable attitude to British Society there is still a denial that within the core idea of Islam there is something that works against British Society. The problem for them, as it was for me, was in a minority who do not represent core-Islam. *But I can now no longer follow this.* Christianity has within it the idea of progression, of developing from a lower state to a higher state, of a journey of discovery in which both religion and culture grow and enrich each other. Not so Islam. It has no concept of progression. It sees the perfect society in seventh century Arabia, in laws made for that society. Where modern society does not conform it is viewed as corrupt. A true Islamist will therefore be a Medievalist and the society in which he now lives will be seen as at enmity to the will of God.

Within mainstream Islam is the seed of violence and hate for things British. That young man, any young man, who lives in your street, who goes to school with your children or grandchildren, who joins at university the Islamic Society is *going* to become a hater of what you hold dear and *may* take an awful decision to manifest that hate. At least that is likely for a significant number, 30%. It is because Islam cannot and will not conform to modern society. If it does it will deny its fundamental premise, that a seventh century document has all that has to be said on human society.

That is how my views have changed. I once bought into the view that only a radical wing of Islam was dangerous. Now I believe all Islam is dangerous despite many good Muslims who honour this country and will her good. On the subject of Terry Jones I believe a little sequence of logic will demonstrate what is the real issue. A man totally unknown outside of a small local scene threatens to burn a Koran. The president of the United States *and other world leaders including our own* beg him not to do it. Why? Because if he did it would have unleashed violence around the world involving the death of thousands. I ask you in order to understand the logic to replace in this sequence the preacher for a Muslim and the Koran for the Bible, *an unknown Muslim threatens to burn a Bible*. Would world leaders have intervened? Of course not. A stupid man would have burnt a Bible and that would have been the end of it. But not so with Islam. The key to the logical sequence is Islam. An insult to Islam is felt by all Muslims, and around the world the response encouraged from pulpits is to kill. Therefore President Obama, Prime Minister Cameron etc. remind the man: Do this act and thousands will die. How can we avoid the inference that Islam and violence are joined at the hip? According the Andrew White the Anglican Chaplain in Baghdad the cause of an attack on a Church in Baghdad in the Autumn of this year (2010) was caused by that threat to burn the Koran, not the deed, rather the threat. Over fifty people died including three priests *even though no Koran was burned*.

The only way forward is to insist on a reappraisal and appreciation of what is British culture, which I believe cannot be uncoupled from the Christian traditions of this land. The two go together. Anybody who wishes to live in this land must pass a criterion that they appreciate and will further the culture of this land. It does not mean that they have to be a Christian. One of the keystones of our culture is respect for people who do things differently from us, which includes Muslims, Jews, Hindus and atheists. What is essential is that they do not actively oppose the core culture. Even Richard Dawkins of *The God Delusion* fame says the same: there are some things British that are indelibly Christian and should remain so. If people do not share the core culture to the point of hating it and encouraging hate of it there must be a process whereby they are removed. Surely the behaviour of many Muslims in Luton puts a big question mark on the suitability of them continuing to live in this country. *And yet openly in the Government whatever its political persuasion there is great fear to say such things*. The sadness is that these views which I espouse are considered in the political forum to be extreme and racist. I would rather say they are British and Christian and part of the disease of our nation is that things British and Christian have quietly become *far right and racist*. This is ridiculous, and yet it has happened. To save our culture we need to learn again to love it.

There is a second alternative – that Islamic scholars meet together, face the issue of Islam and violence and seek reform. This would amount to an Islamic Reformation. However, unlike Christianity, there is no precedent for reform in Islam. It would place in doubt much that is written in the Koran and that Muslims cannot do. Islam cannot but remain Medieval.