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Civil and Religious Law in England: A Student's Perspective

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Introduction

The following thesis deals with a recent social, religious, and legal controversy in England, which was started by a lecture concerning the religious and legal rights of Muslims, one of the largest religious minority groups in England. To better understand the sudden uproar the lecture produced, it is helpful to understand the founding religious principles of England and Muslim's path to acceptance within those principles.

Due to The Church of England's long history in Great Britain, many people consider Christianity part of their British identity. This may also be because, although Great Britain is run by a government based on theories of democracy and secularism, the Church of England is never too far away from political decisions. According to Fetzer and Soper (2005), The Church of England has been an establishment in England since the middle of the 16th century. Its inception came by way of the First and Second Acts of Supremacy in 1534 and 1559 (p. 33). A close relationship initially developed between the state and the Anglican Church in which the institutions worked for shared political and religious goals. Legally, this cooperation came to mean a state-supported and state-enforced religion and the imposition of various restrictions on religious dissenters and nonconformists. While the Church's political powers and privileges have been progressively diluted since the 19th century, there are still many ways in which the Church of England in particular, and Christianity more in general, are legally and politically advantaged. For example, 24 of the Church of England's bishops and its two

archbishops sit by right in the House of Lords; the nation's blasphemy laws protect Christian doctrines; the monarchy and the Church are still linked in some respects; and the provisions made for religious chaplaincy services in public institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and the armed forces advantage clergy of the Church of England (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 33).

Muslim immigration to Great Britain was intended to be temporary. Recruited by the British state to help rebuild British cities after World War II, the Muslim immigrant primary goal was to make enough money to return home to begin new lives with their families. But due to several circumstances (which I will touch on later), many Muslim immigrants began to call Britain home, bringing their families to the country and setting up a new life in a "secular" land with a formally established religion of Christianity.

In their book, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany*, Fetzer and Soper (2005) write that the English government initially gave little consideration to the religious needs of the Muslim immigrant population, because it expected that this largely male, unaccompanied migrant population would eventually return to its country of origin (p. 27). Because both the Muslim immigrant population and the British government viewed the stay of Muslim immigrants in Britain as temporary, little thought was given as to how the assimilation of Muslim values in a country founded on Christian principles would play out.

This early ignorance proved to be no help in the following decades, when Muslim immigrants did in fact decide to stay in Britain. After being

British citizens for close to two decades, in the 1960s, Muslims began to consider what kind of church-state regime they had inherited. Questions about the extent to which the laws on religious rights and the existing patterns of church-state relations in Britain would enable Muslims to adapt their religious values to public policy circulated throughout Muslim communities in Britain (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 32). Interestingly, the British constitution does not establish religious rights as fundamental, so religious free-exercise rights are statutory matters left to the political arena. Because no particular statute relates to the religious rights of Muslims, they are technically free to practice their faith within the bounds of the law. The Human Rights Act of 1998 provides for the idea that religious freedom in Britain is a fundamental right that can be protected against state actions (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 32).

The fact that the British government did not plan for the influx of permanent Muslim immigrants, coupled with these religious “rights,” has left Muslims in Britain living under unrecognized Muslim civil laws within the confines of British law for decades. Although this system works for some Muslims in Britain, due to the confusion of whether only Muslim law, only British law, or both are necessary in certain circumstances, many Muslims in Britain find themselves without legal protection in matters of civil disputes. This confusion is felt not only by the British Muslim population, but also by British officials (Balchin and Warraich, 2006, p. 3).

To shine light on this, Archbishop Rowan Williams addressed the issue of Sharia (Muslim divine law) and its accommodation within the British

legal system as an overlapping jurisdiction, in a lecture, “Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective,” given on February 7, 2008 before the Royal Courts of Justice. While the lecture focused on the complexities of multi-faith communities focusing on Muslims and Sharia, I argue that Williams’ overall intention was to start an interfaith, inter-cultural dialogue to address issues of multiculturalism in Britain. This is particularly important, as Williams’ lecture suggested, for the British Muslim population, whose religious and cultural practices have been largely ignored, creating injustices for British Muslim citizens who now have a long history in Britain.

In the following thesis, I break down Williams’ scholarly lecture, putting its underlying message in plainer and more easily understandable terms. I then recount the public reaction and explain the reaction in the context in which the lecture was given. I then put forth my interpretation of the lecture, which I understood to be Williams’ attempt at interfaith dialogue. In order to justify this interpretation, I explain the history of interfaith dialogue in the ecumenical movement and the use of dialogue in international relations. This ends what I consider to be the first part of my project. The second part begins with a history of the Muslims in Britain, in which I intended to highlight the long stay Muslims have had in Britain, although many still face a legal struggle concerning their religious and cultural beliefs. I then explain Sharia in detail, in order for readers to better understand the terminology in Williams’ lecture. In the last part of the project, I highlight the injustices Muslims face due to the British legal system’s neglect, and the reasons why

this neglect is still present today. I end with a rather simple explanation by a scholar who suggests what Williams' lecture implicated was to give Muslims a right that many religious groups in Britain already possess. This ending highlights the fact that the archbishop's lecture was not at all controversial, but was rather taken out of context, due to the way Muslims are viewed in today's anti-Islamic climate. This is the larger point I'd like to make with this Capstone Project—that isolated incidences such as Williams' lecture and the controversial response it received, portray something larger about society as a whole. The way this speech was received is a specific example of problems of multiculturalism in general.

About the Lecture

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, delivered “Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective,” as the foundation lecture for a series of lectures on “Islam in English Law”—part of the year-long 2008 Temple Festival. The series, run through Temple Church, sought to provide an opportunity “to discuss, honestly, openly and courteously, some of the most difficult legal, religious and ethical questions of our time, and to confront the vital questions to which the systems of English Law and Sharia Law give rise” (Appendix A).

The Temple area in London is a series of buildings associated with the legal profession. The area lies between Fleet Street and the Embankment in the City of London and is mainly divided into the Inner Temple and the Middle Temple, two of the four Inns of Court (“The Temple,” n.d.). The Inns

of Court are a group of four institutions that have historically been responsible for legal education. Their respective governing bodies, the benches, exercise the exclusive right of admitting persons to practice by a formal call to the bar (“Inns of Court,” n.d.). They consist of the Inner Temple and Middle Temple (both housed within The Temple), Lincoln’s Inn, and Gray’s Inn—all of which are located in the general vicinity of the Royal Courts of Justice, at the boundary between the City of London and Westminster (“Inns of Court,” n.d.). The year-long Temple Festival marked the 400th anniversary of King James I granting the Inns freehold of their land. After centuries of being under Church, then Crown, ownership, Inner and Middle Temples gained independence by Royal Charter in August 1608. Temple Church, the church of Inner and Middle Temple serves the two Inns’ members and staff, and all those who work in the area known as The Temple. Known for centuries as the representation of the gulf between Christendom and Islam, Temple Church intended this series of lectures to represent the measures being taken by the Church to become a bridge across that gulf (Appendix A).

Given at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, the permanent home of the Supreme Court, the archbishop’s address was the kickoff to “Islam in English Law.” In his lecture, the archbishop addressed judges, barristers and other legal scholars. Williams intended the lecture to offer a space for serious discussion on what it means to have within society “the presence of communities which, while no less ‘law-abiding’ than the rest of the population, relate to something other than the British legal system alone”

(Appendix B). Throughout the lecture, Williams teased out some of the broader issues around the rights of religious groups within a secular state, using Sharia as an example.

One of the main objectives of the lecture was to spark thought on how religious motivation affects law. Parts of it served as a warning that if lawmakers continued to ignore the influence of religious motivation in a multi-faith society, community cohesion might cease to exist. Williams proposed examining whether there should be a higher level of attention to religious identity in the practice of law. He asked how it might be possible for civil law to accommodate some of the legal procedures by which Muslim communities in Britain have traditionally regulated their relationships and financial affairs, while safeguarding the equality and human rights afforded by modern law for vulnerable individuals (particularly women) within those communities (Beattie, 2008).

The archbishop reiterated that it would be important to ensure that “no ‘supplementary’ jurisdiction could have the power to deny access to the rights granted to other citizens or to punish its members for claiming those rights.” To further his point, Williams mentioned that there is already provision in English law for Jewish and Christian communities to have some autonomy over the governance of their religious affairs, without thereby putting themselves outside the law.

Another question the archbishop considered is whether or not a monopolistic approach to a legal system is the best fit for a modern pluralistic

and democratic state. “Might there be room for ‘overlapping jurisdictions,’ in which individuals can choose in certain limited areas whether to seek justice under one system or another?” the archbishop asked. “Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective” was received with hushed respect at the Royal Courts of Justice, but the general public’s response was much different.

My Experience

The “Islam in English Law” lecture series took place three months prior to my arrival in London to study Muslim cultures in a summer study abroad program. I desired to learn about Islam and Muslim culture to better understand the controversy around the religion and its followers after the events of 9/11 and 7/7. I thought these events made clear the need for improved understanding between Christians and Muslims, East and West, and I wanted to be part of the informed understanding. I was also in London seeking self-discovery, trying to gain a perspective on my Christian background, by studying Islam in a country I thought would have a better model for accepted multiculturalism than the U.S.—because, as many scholars write, religious diversity is now an established fact of life in Britain. But as was quickly seen in the reaction to Williams’ speech, multiculturalism is just as heated a topic in Britain as it is in the U.S.

Upon arriving in London, I was paired with my roommate, Amal, a Muslim college senior from Yemen. Although I consider myself a questioning Christian, as the daughter of a Catholic school teacher, my religious

convictions have been set for me from the day I was born. No two roommates could have come from more opposite backgrounds. Amal, from Yemen, a country where 99 percent of the population is Muslim, had quite a different upbringing. She had come to the West to study Islam, the religion that permeated every part of her life, because she wanted to see how she was viewed outside of her culture. She had not been given this opportunity in Yemen, where most information is government-censored. She was lucky to have a father who supported this aspiration—most women in Yemen were not as lucky, she said.

I vividly remember the first time I saw Amal. We had just arrived in London. It was raining (little did I know it would continue to do so for the rest of my stay), and I had not slept in over 24 hours. Our living quarters were located in a row of identical flats, each four stories tall. I had brought two suitcases, which ended up being one too many. By the time I made it to the fourth floor—of course, we were at the very top—with my second suitcase, I was drenched and irritated. Rounding the corner to my bedroom, I bumped into a petite figure wearing glasses and a scarf around her head. “Oh, hello,” she said under her breath as she quickly scurried away into our living room, large enough to fit only a love seat and a 10-inch TV. Sitting down on my bed, located just a few feet away from Amal’s, I remember feeling completely overwhelmed. Sure, I had come to London to learn about Muslim culture, but I did not expect to be confined to such a small space with someone I had originally come to study. Looking back on my time in London, living with

Amal was perhaps the most enriching learning experience I had that summer, if not in my life thus far.

Due to our stark differences, I was hesitant to open up to Amal at first, but after talking with her only a few times, I felt inspired by her and saw that our similarities outweighed our differences. We had many late-night talks about our religious beliefs, which at times proved to be intense, but Amal and I quickly found common ground, because we realized that both our religions contain many of the same objectives: to set forth a standard of morality and to live with one another in the peace that supposedly informs all religions. For as many conversations that Amal and I had about religion, we had just as many about our families, friends, and universities. We became the best of friends. My friendship with Amal was my first experience of people of different backgrounds and religious beliefs coming together in support of each other. I wondered if this could be a model for addressing cooperation in a multicultural world, and why people in Britain, the U.S., and elsewhere seemed to be blind to this model.

While in London, I started following the negative reaction to Williams' lecture in all levels of the media. The extreme negativity and fear the lecture produced fascinated me, as I was studying Islam and Muslim culture in order to become a more informed citizen in an increasingly multicultural world. Inside the classroom, my professors taught about the similarities of Christians and Muslims; about how Muslims are often misinterpreted in the media; and ultimately, that people of different faiths

must work to understand each other in order for multicultural societies to live together successfully. But outside the classroom, on the streets of London, the philosophy was the opposite. Through Williams' lecture, Christians and people of other faiths pitted themselves against Muslims, believing the most extreme interpretations of what Williams had said. This clash inspired my Honors Capstone project. The following is an examination of Archbishop Rowan Williams' lecture, "Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective" in its religious and legal dimensions.

The Reactions

As was reported in *The Times*, with his lecture, Williams produced one of the most unlikely coalitions seen in Britain in recent times. He was attacked by conservatives, liberals, all three leading political parties, fellow Christians, Jews, and, even some Muslims (Gadher, Taher & Morgan, 2008).

The reports almost invariably condemned the archbishop's speech—most suggesting that Williams argued for the total acceptance of Islamic law. Articles titled "Williams: Victory for terrorism," "They don't live in a Muslim country," and "Arch enemy: Bash the Bishop," decorated the covers of British tabloids. Staff reporters for a particularly popular tabloid, *The Sun*, wrote, "Dr. Williams' extraordinary claim is a huge propaganda coup for extremists plotting to end centuries of the British way of life" (Williams: Victory for terrorism, 2008).

But the uproar was not limited to sensational media outlets. People in various positions of power jumped to negative responses to the lecture, too.

Trevor Phillips, chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, condemned Williams' comments as "muddled and unhelpful," and a senior bishop said that he was "surprised and concerned" by Williams' remarks (Gledhill & Webster, 2008). Baroness Warsi, Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion and Social Action, said, "The Archbishop's comments are unhelpful and may add to the confusion that already exists in our communities . . . All British citizens must be subject to British laws developed through Parliament and the courts" (Gledhill & Webster, 2008). Rabbi Danny Rich, chief executive of Liberal Judaism, said, "I am staggered he has said this. The Jewish community has learnt the value both of participating in the British legal system but at the same time, in certain matters where the state gives it the right, to sort out those matters with its own rabbinic authorities. But we accept that British law has priority" (Gledhill & Webster, 2008).

As was reported in *The Times*, Prime Minister Gordon Brown quickly distanced himself from the lecture, signaling that British law must be based on British values (Gadher, Taher & Morgan, 2008). Andy Burnham, the culture secretary, went further, suggesting that the introduction of a parallel Islamic legal system would be "a recipe for social chaos" (Gadher, Taher & Morgan, 2008). Polls suggested that up to a third of the UK's bishops were thought to be unhappy with Williams' remarks. "I find it hard to imagine what lies behind his comments," said David Phillips, general secretary of the Church Society, the oldest evangelical grouping in the Church of England. "It seems to be completely irrational for a Christian leader to want to introduce a

separate system which doesn't have Christian values and would be divisive” (Gadher, Taher & Morgan, 2008).

Fueled by the media and those in power, many British citizens in turn condemned the archbishop's lecture. “[If] He doesn't want to see the extremes of Islamic law, then why is he opening the door to it, because that is where it will end up and by opening the debate that nobody wanted he will fuel a fire no one will put out,” Nick Dixon of Sutton Coldfield, England wrote into *The Times* (Sharia in Britain: your reaction, 2008). Dixon's reaction is an example of the type of response that more than 17,000 BBC viewers wrote on the BBC's online message boards following Williams' lecture (Gadher, Taher & Morgan, 2008). Switchboards at Lambeth Palace and Canterbury Cathedral were flooded with angry calls in the aftermath of the lecture. Because of mass of vehemently negative responses, police sources said they advised the archbishop on measures he should take to ensure his personal safety and even went as far as offering him protection (which he refused) (Gadher, Taher & Morgan, 2008).

The Telegraph staff made note that there were two points of legitimate concern that brought about the negative response to Williams' lecture. The first was that the archbishop—who heads a national institution with a constitutional function—explicitly called into question the most fundamental principle of British justice: that there is a single system of law that applies equally to everyone (Dr. Rowan Williams' words were understood, 2008). The other is that, at a time when British cultural assumptions and institutions

were under threat from a particularly aggressive interpretation of Islam¹, the head of its Established Church was unprepared to offer a robust defense of its values, apparently preferring to concede to the demands of what was a minority, even among the Muslim community (Dr. Rowan Williams' words were understood, 2008).

It must be noted, however, that *The Telegraph* staff's "points of concern" are derived from a misinterpretation of Williams' lecture. I argue that the archbishop did not "call into question a single system of law," but instead, that Williams simply suggested that certain aspects of Sharia, such as civil law (which would abide by the British legal system), be used as a supplementary jurisdiction.² Secondly, when *The Telegraph* staff writes that Williams was "conceding to the demands of what was a minority," they are under the assumption that the archbishop called for the total implementation of all aspects of Sharia (including criminal law), which he did not. I argue that because *The Telegraph's* "points of concern" are derived from a misinterpretation of Williams' lecture, they are not relevant and should not be entertained as such.

The largely negative response to Williams' lecture from all sectors of British society gives telling insight into the acceptance of Islam in Britain in particular and into the state's acceptance of multiculturalism in general. As Tina Beattie (2008) writes on OpenDemocracy.net:

¹This is *The Telegraph* staff's biased opinion. I do not think the idea that there was a "threat" due to an "aggressive interpretation of Islam" is a statement of fact or that this idea holds any validity.

²I expand on this idea in the "What Williams Actually Said" section.

[...] The furious response to the archbishop's comments reveals a great deal about the hostility and ignorance with regard to Islam which forms a potent undercurrent in Britain's ostensibly multi-cultural society. [...] Serious journalists who ought to know better have derided Williams for being too scholarly; the widespread belief seems to be that he has only himself to blame if people failed to grasp the subtleties of his argument. The logic of this message is that public figures must "dumb down" or be damned. (Rowan Williams and sharia law)

Many people did feel the archbishop needed to, as Beattie writes, "dumb down" his argument, and I think this is solely due the fact that he was speaking about Islam. Because Islam is such a touchy subject in Britain, in that hostility and misunderstanding surround it, Williams' needed to be much clearer with the message of his lecture. This was seen in the fact that the immediate response of the public (as seen above) was to prey on Islam as a barbaric religion. As noted Iranian anthropologist, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, told me in an interview, "When you say Sharia law, the image comes of chopping hands and this sort of thing. So it [Williams' lecture] was taken by media and the whole message was totally distorted" (personal communication, July 7, 2008). The sensitivity that public figures in Britain need to use when talking about Islam is a response to the public's ignorance and is an isolated example of how Islam is viewed globally. As Tarek Mitri writes:

[...] misinterpretations or exaggerations of the role of religions in the relations among and within nations mark attitudes and perceptions of various local tensions or conflicts, thus leading to their aggravation. Local relations between Muslims and Christians are significantly affected by the propagation of a globalist discourse. Historically specific or culturally, politically and religiously diverse, the situations of Muslims in relation to non-Muslims remain, in the eyes of many, essentially the same. (Al-Azmeh & Fokas, 2007, p. 21)

And because Muslims are seen as a monolith—often a hostile monolith, especially when considering religious law—talk of accommodation and formal recognition of Sharia within a secular system prompts fear, and from that fear, barriers. This misinterpreted globalist rhetoric has made it so that Muslims and Westerners are seen as incompatible, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for dialogue and understanding. In her book, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*, Jocelyne Cesari (2004) explains:

The persistent rhetoric on the cultural (and even racial) incompatibility of Muslims and Europeans is part of an essentializing meta-narrative sweeping through the most varied segments of European societies, from the intellectual, political, and journalistic spheres down to ordinary citizens. Such rhetoric is a definite obstacle to understanding, and prevents a true appreciation of the mechanisms of Islamic integration in European culture, particularly with respect to multiculturalism and secularism.” (p. 35)

Because of the seeming incompatibility between Muslims and Europeans, a growing number of Muslims feel that they have no stake in British society, its institutions and its values. As Beattie (2008) writes, the resulting social meltdown is reflected in a crisis in the British legal system (Rowan Williams and sharia law). This breakdown in trust, law, and social cohesion has a major effect on how Muslims interact in British society. It has a particularly devastating impact upon young Muslims who turn to crime, violence and alcohol as forms of escape from the social rejection that confronts them. “This complex of problems far exceeds that posed by political extremism in religious guise or by the challenges of legal pluralism; and ignorance,

complacency and cultural bigotry are poor responses to them,” (Beattie, 2008).

In recognition of the ignorance that surrounds Islam in Britain, to conclude his lecture, Dr. Williams called for “a fair amount of deconstruction of crude opposition and mythologies whether of the nature of Sharia or the nature of the Enlightenment.” The following pages are my attempt at starting this deconstruction. I intend to give relevant background information to place the archbishop’s lecture deep in its context and help decipher what I believe to have been Dr. Williams’ intentions, as well as why I believe, due to the injustices British Muslim citizens face, Williams’ lecture should not be interpreted as controversial, but as a necessary message to a multicultural state in the 21st century.

The Context

Just a month before Williams’ gave the “Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective” lecture, one of his (then) fellow bishops, Dr. Michael Nazir-Ali of Rochester, wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* that Islamic extremists had created dangerous “no-go” areas for non-Muslims across Britain (Wynne-Jones, 2008). In the article, Nazir-Ali wrote:

[...]One of the results of this has been to further alienate the young from the nation in which they were growing up and also to turn already separate communities into “no-go” areas where adherence to this ideology has become a mark of acceptability. Those of a different faith or race may find it difficult to live or work there because of hostility to them and even the risk of violence. In many ways, this is but the other side of the coin to far-Right intimidation. (Extremism flourished as UK lost Christianity, 2008)

In his lecture, Williams combated this kind of mindset toward Muslims in the UK, which, ironically, was put forth by one of his fellow bishops. Williams' lecture stepped away from viewing Muslims as "hostile and violent" and instead as British citizens whose religious rights should be respected just as those of other faith groups in Britain. But because the lecture was received and interpreted in a time of the clashing of religions and the clashing of Islam and the West—at a time when the United States' "War on Terror" can be translated as a "War against Islam"—people did not have the capacity to truly understand the archbishop's suggestions and instead took the lecture out of context, distorting its meaning and purpose.

The misinterpretation of Williams' lecture, which created hostility between peoples, can be explained by the fear that is associated with Muslims in today's post 9/11, 7/7 climate. It is important to understand this context in order to breakdown the controversy. The reaction to the lecture revealed the public's fear of Sharia, but it also runs deeper than that, equating to the fear of Islam in particular and Muslims in general. This fear has created ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims in the West and it is in this heightened context of fear that the meaning of the archbishop's lecture was deciphered. The relevance of Williams' lecture depends on its context for interpretation, thus following the philosophical view of contextualism—why we judge in most contexts that we have knowledge and why we judge in some contexts that we do not (Black, 2006, n.d.). In the philosophy of contextualism, an approach widely used in literature, meanings might become

twisted in various contexts, which creates confusion, as is what happened regarding Williams' lecture. In the context of the lecture, many people jumped to the conclusion that they possessed knowledge of Sharia and, that on top of that, Williams' was proposing the implementation of Sharia in its most extreme interpretation (the only interpretation known by most people).

This leads to the essential question: Where is it that people in the West and in this case, specifically Britain, get their idea of Islam and what it means to be Muslim? Why do Westerners feel that they *know* what Sharia is? Most would point to the news and entertainment media, which, in Britain, is known for its sensationalistic portrayal of Muslims. The unfair treatment of Muslims in British society was brought to light when a 1997 report, compiled for the British government by a race relations think tank, the Runnymede Trust, coined the term "Islamaphobia" to describe the nature and the extent of anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 32). A second study on religious discrimination, commissioned by the Home Office (the Derby Report) in 1999, similarly reported that Muslim groups experienced a consistently higher level of unfair treatment than other religious communities (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 32). This unfair treatment of Muslims is most clearly seen in British media. An example of the misleading and sensationalist coverage of Muslims in British media was seen after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The day following the bombing, the British newspaper, *Today*, carried the headline "In the name of Islam," accompanied by a picture of a

fireman carrying the charred remains of a dead baby. Very quickly afterward, authorities established that the bombing had, in fact, not involved Muslims.

In 2007, the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, commissioned a major study that investigated the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the UK print and broadcast media (Appendix C). The report, “The Search for Common Ground,” researched by nine leading academics, professionals from the media industry, and experts on Islam showed that, during the period of investigation, the national media overwhelmingly portrayed Muslims and Islam in a negative way. In 12 out of 19 papers covered, the researchers concluded that every article carried was negative. In the tabloids, 96 percent of the coverage was assessed to be negative while 89 percent of broadsheet reporting was deemed to be negative.

This negative image of Muslims in the West, which is produced on a daily basis in the media, is incredibly misleading and terrifies many people, even the highly educated who may well know better. The umbrella of fear around Islam is not conducive to a cohesive multicultural society in Britain, a country that a third generation of Muslims now calls home.

In recognizing the tensions around Islam in the UK, as the figurehead of the Anglican Church in England, Williams used his lecture for “Islam and English Law” as an avenue to open up dialogue between Muslims, Christians and people of other faiths in the UK. This was seen in his opening remarks at the Royal Courts of Justice when he said:

This is not only an issue about Islam but about other faith groups, including Orthodox Judaism, and indeed it spills over

into some of the questions which have surfaced sharply in the last twelve months about the right of religious believers in general to opt out of certain legal provisions
[...]

Although it was not interpreted in this way, I believe Williams' lecture, among other things, was largely an attempt at interfaith dialogue in hopes of leading to an informed discussion of the above problems in British society including the misunderstanding of Muslim practices, the rejection of cohesive multiculturalism, and a legal system unfit for a multi-faith, multicultural society. Although England has not seen in a long time an archbishop as open to interfaith dialogue as Williams, interfaith dialogue is not completely foreign to The Church of England.

Dr. Rowan Williams

It was reported that Williams was in a "state of shock" and "completely overwhelmed" by the animosity his lecture received, especially from within the church. Friends said that he said he "had expected a critical reaction but nothing like this" (Gadher & Taher & Morgan, 2008). It should be noted, however, that the archbishop is somewhat used to controversy connected with reaching out to other religions—in fact, he has a track record of dealing with such controversy. While many find interfaith dialogue commendable, Williams' critics argue that his time would be better spent trying to heal the deep divisions within the 77 million-strong worldwide Anglican Church (Rayner, 2008). A person in his inner circle said Williams' biggest fault "is that too often he seems to bend over backwards to be kinder to his enemies than he is to us" (Rayner, 2008).

Williams, 58—who spent 24 years as an academic at Oxford and Cambridge, earning a list of theology degrees, doctorates, and professorships before being appointed Bishop of Monmouth in 1992—is, at heart, an academic (Rayner, 2008). He is a man who is more comfortable with highbrow conversation than small talk and is considered the most intellectual archbishop in centuries. His resume includes two collections of published poetry, as well as numerous theological works, and the ability to speak or read eight languages, including Russian, Latin and Greek (Rayner, 2008).

Dr. Williams is also one of the most, if not the most, liberal archbishop of all time. Prior to becoming the head of the Anglican Church, Williams had built a reputation as a conscientious liberal, supporting gay rights and female ordination within the church. He founded the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality in 1996 (Anthony, 2008). The following year he was proposed as Bishop of Southwark, but George Carey, his predecessor as Archbishop of Canterbury, withdrew the offer when Williams refused to stop promoting gay rights (Anthony, 2008). As the issue of gay priests threatened to split the church, however, Williams made it clear that he wanted unity more than liberty. Things came to a head when he proposed Jeffrey John, who is gay, as Bishop of Reading in 2003, and then, following evangelical protests, asked him to stand down. Since then, Williams has abandoned any agenda-setting statements (Anthony, 2008).

Critics also point to Williams' lack of experience as a parish clergyman as another of the archbishop's weaknesses. They state that he has

spent relatively little time engaging with the problems of “ordinary” people. While many bishops are known for speaking from the heart, Williams has a more dense and ambiguous approach, in which he labors over nuances rather than speaking in plain terms. The approach often causes him to fail at getting his point across to the general public.

Williams’ dense approach was seen in his lecture for the “Islam in English Law” lecture series. The archbishop was overly intellectual and scholarly, which produced a speech the general public had difficulty digesting with clarity. As Beattie (2008) writes:

[the lecture] conveys the sense of a serious scholar reveling in a rare opportunity (even for the Archbishop of Canterbury) to explore ideas of some intellectual complexity in a public forum. Even for those accustomed to reading academic papers, it is a densely argued, perhaps unnecessarily convoluted exercise in postmodern jurisprudence, cross-referenced with numerous other academic sources, which would require several close readings to appreciate its careful and nuanced reflections.

Due to this approach, all throughout England, Williams’ lecture was misunderstood. As Beattie (2008) notes, the archbishop did not intend his lecture to be a series of propositions, but an invitation to the legal establishment to consider the challenges posed to the abstract universalities of a post-Enlightenment concept of law by the traditional values and identities associated with religious communities. Nowhere in the lecture does Williams call for the implementation of Sharia, although this was the default assumption. To combat this assumption, I argue that in addition to discussing the challenge of enforcing law in a multicultural state, Williams’ lecture was

an attempt at interfaith, inter-cultural dialogue, which has a long history in the ecumenical movement.

Interfaith Dialogue and the Ecumenical Movement

At its most basic level, interfaith dialogue involves people of different religious faiths coming together to have a conversation—a conversation aimed at mutual understanding (Garfinkel, 2004). These conversations can take an array of forms, and they possess a variety of goals and formats. They can also take place at various social levels and target different types of participants, including elites, mid-level professionals, and grassroots activists (Garfinkel, 2004). The programs may resemble secular peacebuilding programs in some way. In other ways, religious content and spiritual culture are infused throughout the programs, distinguishing them from their secular counterparts (Garfinkel, 2004).

The Swiss theologian, Catholic priest, and prolific author, Hans Kung, has famously written, “There is no peace in the world without peace between religions.” The ecumenical movement, which began in the early 20th century, started with this idea. Although the main purpose of the movement was to unify the Protestant churches of the world and, ultimately, all Christians, it also focused on faiths outside of Christianity and therefore, inter-religious dialogue has been at its forefront from the beginning of the movement.

Michael Kinnamon (1988), a long-time educator and ecumenical leader, writes that the vision behind the ecumenical movement is best understood as a constant tension between truth and diverse community (p. 13).

Kinnamon (1988) notes that the central issue facing the contemporary ecumenical movement is how to determine the acceptable limits of diversity.

As a Roman Catholic ecumenist, Yves Congar, writes:

I think the prime theological problem raised by ecumenism today is that of specifying as far as possible what differences are compatible with the establishment of full communion. What diversity can authentic unity admit? (Kinnamon, 1988, p. 14)

It is this central question that Williams addressed in his 2008 lecture. How much diversity is compatible with the religious (and legal) code in Britain? Also, how much diversity are British citizens, many of whom consider Christianity to be a part of their identities, willing to accept? Lastly, what will inclusion or the rejection of diversity mean for the state and its citizens? To further understand the history behind these questions, I will trace the ecumenical movement back to its modern inception.

The Beginning of the Ecumenical Movement³

In 1910, the movement known as Church Reunion in Great Britain, and as Christian Unity in the U.S., was active in seeking a creed behind which all Christians could unite. In the same year, the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, the World Missionary Conference, took place at Edinburgh. The question of Christian understanding of, and relationship to, other religious traditions was a central issue in Edinburgh. While the evangelistic thrust predominated in the overall Edinburgh message, the discussions there stimulated scholarly interest, both in comparative religion

³ All of the history of the Ecumenical Movement (the entire timeline and all the dates) was taken from, Ariarajah, 2002.

and in exploring the Christian relation to other faith traditions. The Edinburgh conference also led to the establishment of the International Missionary Council in 1921, which fostered cooperation in mission activity and among the younger churches.

By the time of the next international missionary conference in Jerusalem in 1928, considerable controversy had risen within the missionary movement over the approach to other religious traditions. Some European theologians detected in liberal Protestantism, especially in the U.S., troubling arguments in support of a universal religion. But the issue that dominated the Jerusalem meeting was rising secularism in both the East and West. While asserting that the Christian gospel provided the answers to a troubled world, the conference affirmed the “values” in other religions and called on Christians to join hands with all believers to confront the growing impact of secular culture.

Some participants, however, could not agree with Jerusalem’s positive affirmation of other faiths and maintained that the Christian gospel is unique among religious traditions. Thus, even though the message was unanimously accepted, the Christian attitude to other faiths became a highly controversial issue shortly after the Jerusalem meeting. Christians were criticized for having exclusive attitudes toward other faiths, but they claimed that the challenge to the Christian faith came not from other faiths, but from anti-religious and secular movements.

The Rise of Nationalism in the Ecumenical Movement

At the international missionary conference in Tambaram, India, in 1938, it was concluded that Christians were not agreed on the revelatory character of other religious traditions and that this was a matter urgently demanding thought and united study within the ecumenical movement. Not long after Tambaram, however, Europe became deeply involved in WWII, and once the war was over, philosophies changed. Nationalism was sweeping through the newly independent states in Asia and Africa, and with it came a revival of religious traditions. The churches, awakened to the need to express their unity in a world devastated by war, came together in Amsterdam in 1948 to form the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC brought together Protestant, Orthodox Eastern, and Old Catholic bodies, and today is the chief instrument of ecumenicity.

One of the strategies adopted at the WCC was to set up a number of study centers around the world that would address the question of interfaith relations in concrete historical situations. Another was a long-term joint study on “The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men,” which sought to take the discussion beyond Tambaram and the continuity-discontinuity polarity.

A great deal of attention was focused on Asia, where an assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in 1961—at which the IMC was integrated into the WCC—challenged the churches to take seriously the experience of the younger churches in the newly independent countries, where they had to work and struggle together with the peoples of different religious traditions in nation-building. In this context, the concept of dialogue appears in the New

Delhi statement as a way of speaking about Christian relations with people of other faith traditions. This was further considered at the first world mission gathering in Mexico City in 1963. A more significant discussion took place at the East Asia Christian Conference assembly in Bangkok in 1964. Its statement on “Christian Encounter with Men of Other Beliefs,” incorporating much of the re-thinking in Asia in relation to other faiths, took the debate at many points beyond Tambaram.

Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (“*Nostra Aetate*”) on October 28, 1965 at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was another major step in the ecumenical movement. The declaration said that the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in non-Christian religions, called for an end to anti-Semitism, and said any discrimination based on race, color, religion or condition of life is foreign to the mind of Christ (Second Vatican Council approved 16 documents, 2005). Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry has described the impact of *Nostra Aetate* as “an astonishing transformation” (Rosen, 2005). In relation to the Jewish People the implications were revolutionary. As Rosen (2005) writes, with the promulgation of this declaration, a people—formerly viewed at best as a fossil but more often as cursed and condemned to wander and suffer—was now officially portrayed as beloved by God and somehow very much still part of the Divine plan for humankind.

Then, in 1967, a WCC conference in Kandy, Sri Lanka, proved to be a landmark both as the beginning of serious interest in interfaith dialogue such as in the WCC, and as the first involvement in the ecumenical discussion of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians. The Kandy meeting affirmed dialogue as the most appropriate approach in interfaith relation, and after the Uppsala assembly in 1968, the WCC commission on World Mission and Evangelism engaged Stanley J. Samartha of India to pursue with greater intensity the study begun some years earlier on “The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men.”

The Turning Point in the Ecumenical Movement

The first inter-religious dialogue convened under WCC auspices took place in Ajaltoun, Lebanon, in 1970. Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian participants came together, not only to consult about inter-religious dialogue, but to actually engage in it. Two months later, a WCC consultation in Zurich evaluated the experience of dialogue in Ajaltoun and produced a report. This report became the fundamental document on the basis of which the WCC central committee, meeting in Addis Ababa in 1971, would create a new sub-unit on “Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies,” recognizing that those committed to other religious traditions are people of living faiths. It was an invitation to Christians to reflect on “what God may be doing in the lives of hundreds of millions of men and women who live in and seek community together with Christians, but along different ways.” The establishment of the WCC sub-unit on dialogue heightened the visibility of

interfaith dialogue in the life of the churches. It organized bilateral dialogue meetings with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists and sought to clarify the meaning and significance of interfaith dialogue.

Within the Christian tradition, the practice of dialogue has raised questions regarding the theological assumptions about other faiths at the heart of Christian mission. In 1975, at the WCC's fifth assembly in Nairobi, a suspicion of interfaith dialogue among some Christians surfaced. For the first time, five people of other faiths were invited to a WCC assembly as special guests and took part in the discussions of the section on "Seeking Community," where the dialogue issue was debated. Discussion of the report of this section highlighted the deep disagreement within the church on the issue of dialogue. Fears were expressed that dialogue would lead to syncretism, or that it would compromise faith in the uniqueness and finality of the revelation in Christ, or that it would possibly threaten a mission seen as fundamental to the being of the church itself. The assembly referred the report back to the drafting group, which added a preamble to meet the hesitations expressed at the plenary.

But Nairobi made clear the urgent need to further clarify the nature, purpose and limits of interfaith dialogue and to give more detailed attention to issues of syncretism, culture, mission, etc. Evaluating the debate, the WCC central committee authorized a major theological consultation to pursue the questions raised at the assembly. That meeting, on the theme "Dialogue in Community," held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1977, aimed to clarify the

Christian basis for seeking community with others and to draw up guidelines for Christian communities in pluralistic situations, in order that they might become communities of service and witness, without compromising their commitment to Christ.

The Chiang Mai consultation affirmed that dialogue is not a betrayal of mission, but a way “in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today.” This led to the formulation of “Guidelines on Dialogue,” adopted by the WCC central committee in 1979 (Appendix D). Williams’ lecture, “Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective” was an attempt to follow the “Guidelines on Dialogue” adopted in Chiang Mai. In the lecture, the archbishop touched on several of its 13 points, including, “partners in dialogue should take stock of the religious, cultural and ideological diversity of their local situation,” “partners in dialogue should be free to define themselves,” and “dialogue should generate educational efforts in the community.”

Dialogue Among Civilizations

While it is important to comprehend the interfaith dialogue movement in order to better understand Williams’ lecture, it is useful to also look at the history of dialogue in international relations. Doing so will help to place the lecture even deeper in its context, highlighting its political history.

The year 2001, ironically, was designated by the United Nations as “The Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.” The mission behind framing the year this way was to bring two groups of people in the world together—

the one which perceived diversity as a threat and the other, which perceived it as an opportunity—to redefine diversity and to improve dialogue. To do this, governments, the United Nations, and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations were invited by the United Nations General Assembly to plan and implement cultural, educational and social programs to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations.

Several historical events had brought about “The Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations,” perhaps the most controversial being the publication of Samuel Huntington’s 1993 *Clash of Civilizations*, in which Huntington proposed that people’s cultural and religious identities would be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Huntington’s book aroused a strong response, which in turn stimulated dialogue among civilizations. This seemed to have had a snowball effect in the following years. In October 1994, a report entitled *Our Global Neighborhood* was adopted by the Commission on Global Governance, composed of prestigious public figures from over 20 countries, calling for “a new kind of dialogue among civilization” (Qurong, 2001). In May 1995, scholars from Japan and a dozen European countries got together in Rumania for the second “Sinaia Dialogue,” which advocated dialogues and exchanges among “different civilization centers” (Qurong, 2001). In October of the same year, the then-German President Roman Herzog delivered a speech at Frankfurt under the title “Inter-cultural Dialogue Versus Global Culture Wars,” and Pakistan hosted a large-scale “Dialogue between Islam and the West” at Karachi (Qurong, 2001). In December 1997, the eighth

Islamic Summit issued the Tehran Declaration “emphasizing the imperative of positive interaction, dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions, and rejecting the theories of clash and conflict which breed mistrust and diminish the grounds for peaceful interaction among nations” (Qurong, 2001).

In September 1998, then-Iranian President Mohammad Khatami made a formal proposal at the 53rd UN General Assembly that 2001 be designated “The Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations,” which won universal approval. Similar resolutions were adopted at the 54th and 55th sessions of the UN General Assembly. In early September 2000, a round-table conference under the theme of dialogue among different civilizations was held in New York, with the participation of many heads of state, foreign ministers, prominent scholars and thinkers (Qurong, 2001).

“The Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations” came at a time when leaders in international relations were attempting to redefine the moment in history by something other than confrontation, which was its previous definition, due to two world wars and the Cold War, which lasted over four decades. Because many view dialogue as the opposite of confrontation, this seemed to be a perfect fit.

Thanks to the end of the Cold War, dialogue among cultures and civilizations entered a new era with clearer purpose, better organization, larger scope and greater sustainability. Due to “The Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations,” global dialogue has spread from political, military, and security fields to underlying social and economic arenas and has penetrated into the

realm of culture and psyche (Qurong, 2001). However, the age of dialogue that started in 2001, did not stop attacks such as 9/11 and 7/7. In recognition of this, in 2007, Mohammad Khatami, the initiator and key sponsor of the 2001 United Nations “Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations,” founded The Foundation for Dialogue Among Civilizations “to contribute to enhanced and meaningful dialogue and strengthened interactions and exchange among and within different cultures, religions, countries and civilizations.”⁴ The Foundation believes that “dialogue among civilizations is conducive to mutual understanding, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and international cooperation and security.”⁵ With his lecture, Williams seemed to adhere to this philosophy. The archbishop recognized Britain was reaching a breaking point with its multicultural population and that he needed to break the silence for action to ensue. Williams used the “Islam in English Law” lectures series and his position as the Archbishop of Canterbury to do just that.

History of Muslims in Britain

To better understand the history of Muslims in Britain, I want to take a closer look at the immigration trend of Muslims to Britain to show where this history has left Muslims in Britain today. The ethnic diversity of Muslims in Europe is striking. Arabs constitute the most numerous ethnic group, with around 3.5 million, 45 percent of whom are of Moroccan origin, living in Western Europe. The second largest ethnic group is the Turkish, with more than 2.5 million individuals scattered throughout Europe. The third largest

⁴ According to the Foundation’s Web site.

⁵ According to the Foundation’s Web site.

group, with more than 800,000 people, consists of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent: from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh (Cesari, 2004, p. 9). The majority of Muslims living in Great Britain are from this third group. According to government figures based on the 2001 Census, just under half (46 percent) of Muslims living in Great Britain in 2001 had been born in the UK, while 39 percent had been born in Asia—mainly Pakistan (18 percent), Bangladesh (nine percent) and India (three percent) (Balchin and Warraich, 2006, p. 27).

It is important to note, however, that it is difficult to obtain fully accurate statistics on Muslims in most European countries because, until the 2001 census, religious affiliation was not a question. Before then, census estimates drew on relatively large surveys, which based their conclusions on inferences drawn from other available, seemingly helpful information such as ethnic origin or country of birth. For South Asians, the extrapolation from ethnic origin to religion was relatively straightforward, since almost all Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims. But this was difficult in the case of Muslims from places such as India, Cyprus and Malaysia, since the populations of these countries are not overwhelmingly Muslim.

European Muslims constitute a postcolonial minority culture, in that they come primarily from countries formerly colonized or dominated by the most influential European countries. The beginnings of the Islamic presence in Great Britain are linked to the British colonial expansion in India. During the latter part of the 18th century, the British East India Company hired

manual laborers for their ships from Indian ports (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p.26). Some of these hired hands were Muslims. Islamic presence continued to grow after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Large number of Yemenis and Somalis also immigrated to England by way of the Port of Aden (Cesari, 2004, p.12). These Yemeni communities established themselves in Great Britain, creating *zawia* (Sufi brotherhoods) and even importing a sheikh to oversee them. For the most part, however, the Muslim presence in Britain prior to the Second World War was invisible (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 26).

As Fetzer and Soper (2005) explain the first large wave of Muslim immigrants came to Britain after the war, and the pattern of this immigration was rooted in British colonialism (p. 26). The colonial origins of Muslim presence in Europe have a direct bearing on the perception of Islam in European culture. As Cesari (2004) explains: “In particular it explains the ‘delay effect’ in European understanding: that is, how long it took Europeans to recognize that Islam has become a permanent fixture in the religious landscape. How else to explain the fact that Muslims have been present in the main countries of Europe for half a century, and yet it is only in the past three decades that Islam has emerged as a cultural and religious phenomenon?” (p. 12, 13).

Cesari (2004) marks the displacement of people from the Indian subcontinent after the partition of British India in 1947 as the first movement of Muslims to Europe, which lasted into the 1970s (p. 12). As I previously note, the state had an economic incentive to encourage the migration of

foreign workers to help rebuild British cities that had been damaged during the war (Cesari, 2004, p. 13). The arrival of these Muslims was thus the result of a conscious policy of immigration, drawn up between industry and the most powerful European states. Ataulloh Siddiqui, a Senior Research Fellow at the Islamic Foundation, writes that these immigrants wanted “to earn enough money so that they would return to Pakistan, buy a plot of land and build a house there” (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 27). For a variety of reasons though, including the better economic and educational opportunities in Britain and the poor political circumstances in their home countries, many Muslim immigrants stayed. And under the terms of the 1948 British Nationality Act, Commonwealth immigrants had access to all the rights and privileges of British citizenship. The intent of this policy was to allow white colonial subjects to gain automatic citizenship when they returned to Britain, but the policy’s unintended consequence was to give similar legal rights to non-white immigrants (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 27).

With the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, however, a series of Labor and Conservative governments passed laws that tightened citizenship laws and sharply limited the right of Commonwealth citizens to enter Britain. The result of these new policies was the virtual cessation of primary immigration. As Fetzer and Soper (2005) write, at this time, race shaped the politics of immigration control. The government was specifically concerned with “colored” immigration, wanting to avoid racial pluralism, assuming it was a problem (p. 28).

While the state placed significant restrictions on primary immigration, it did not deny the legal rights of those already admitted, which included the right of family reunification. This loophole in Britain's immigration policy created what Cesari (2004) refers to as the second phase of immigration. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s and 80s, the largely male primary immigrant population brought their families from overseas to join them in Britain, causing mass immigration (p. 14). For Muslims, this marked an increase for opportunities interaction outside of the workplace. It was no longer possible to think of oneself as worker in transit: the signs of permanency were numerous and irreversible. The creation of prayer rooms in the 1970s was the first visible sign of this change in Muslims' conditions and mind-set. After having been all but nonexistent in the preceding decades, prayer rooms began to appear all over Western Europe, in Paris, Marseille, London, Bradford, and Berlin, with more than 6,000 by the end of the 1990s (Cesari, 2004, p. 14). The increased visibility of mosques sparked a demand from Muslims for the mosques to be recognized as public buildings equal in status to temples, churches and synagogues (Cesari, 2004, p. 14). The ethnic minority population expanded rapidly from the 1970s on, growing from an estimated 1 million in 1968 to 3 million in 1991. As a proportion of the total population, the non-white population grew from 1 percent in 1968 to 5.5 percent in 1991, and to 7.1 percent in 2001 (Fetzer and Soper, 2005, p. 29).

Cesari's (2004) third phase in the history of Muslim immigration to Europe began with the waves of refugees and asylum-seekers in the 1980s.

The severe restrictions placed on legal immigration to Western Europe, as well as the upheavals in the dying Soviet Union, were the two most important causes of this third wave of immigrants in general, and of Muslim immigrants in particular. This dawning of European Islam occurred just as Islam was emerging as a social movement and a political force, both in the Muslim world and on the international stage (p. 15).

The deep history of Muslims in Europe, and specifically in Britain, focuses the need for British leaders to fully recognize the injustices taking place throughout Muslim communities in the UK. While it must be noted that Britain has been accommodating to Muslims in areas such as religious instruction in state schools, state aid to religious schools, and mosque-building, there are still many injustices Muslims face in British society. These injustices, which I will touch on later, stem from the British government's lack of knowledge of the needs of British Muslim communities and British society's unwillingness to fully accept Muslim cultural and religious practices. But due to the extensive history of Muslims in Britain, leaders in Britain must begin to fully recognize the needs of the British Muslim population and adopt policies to allow for British Muslim citizens to feel a part of their state's community. A start to this would be becoming educated on Muslim practices and ways of life, such as Sharia.

What is Sharia?

In order to prepare for this project, while in London, I visited Regent's Park Mosque to attend a seminar called "Sharia: A Way of Life." Seminars

such as this were commonplace that summer because of the controversy raised by Williams' lecture. This particular seminar was open to the general public by invitation and was meant to give an understanding of Sharia and its role in public life—a perfect fit for this project.

I walked into the Regent's Park Mosque in London with all the confidence one can possess. "Al Salam Alykom," I said, greeting members of the Sharia council as I sat down. I was prepared for this meeting. I wore loose-fitted clothing covering my body from my ankles to my wrists; I had draped a light scarf over my head and wore little make-up. I had studied Muslim culture for seven weeks, felt secure with my knowledge, and was excited to put it to use.

But walking into the Regent's Park Mosque, I could feel that all the eyes in the room were upon me. Leaning over to unpack my voice recorder, I glanced up, smiling uncomfortably at the onlookers. A room full of confused faces stared back at me.

When I scanned the room, my eyes met those of a stern, fully-bearded, older man pointing to the right side of the room with a straight arm and extended finger. It was then I realized the limits of my knowledge. I was sitting on the men's side of the room, thus breaking a Muslim tradition of separation of men and women in public spaces.

When I entered the Regent's Park Mosque, I did not know its history or its supremacy in Britain, but because I was just coming from a study abroad program focused solely on Muslim culture, I felt confident that my knowledge

and understanding of the culture was more than enough for me to act like an insider. But perhaps I was a bit too confident because, as seen by my entrance, I still had a lot to learn.

This experience taught me that, on a larger scale, states have to dedicate a lot of time and energy to cross-cultural understanding—that in order for different cultures to live with each other and thrive in the same area, we must make a concerted effort to constantly learn about each other, tolerating differences and bonding in similarities. Multicultural understanding cannot be accomplished with little effort and in a small dose of time. It takes a true desire to learn and understand, and this desire must sustain and be present at all times.

Regent's Park Mosque and Sharia

As Fetzer and Soper write (2005), as Muslims settled in Britain, they originally worshiped in makeshift prayer rooms, but began to construct formal mosques. The number of mosques has expanded rapidly over the past several decades, from an estimated 10 in 1945, to 329 in 1989 and 1,493 in 2003 (p. 47). Given an estimated 1.6 million Muslims living in Great Britain, there is one mosque or prayer room for every 1,071 Muslims in England, Wales, and Scotland (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 47). In contrast with other European countries, mosque-building in Britain has not been particularly controversial. As a matter of public policy, the decision to grant permission for the construction of a mosque rests with local political officials, and while some observers have noted that the planning process is sometimes delayed because

of questions about parking spaces and the impact the mosque might have on traffic, no one Fetzer and Soper (2005) interviewed asserted that a mosque-building project had been blocked on illegitimate or religious grounds (p. 47).

The building of the Regent's Park Mosque followed this uncontroversial path, with meticulous planning. From the beginning of the 20th century, several efforts were made to build a mosque in Central London. After much talk, in 1940, the British Government was persuaded to present a site for a mosque for the Muslim community in Great Britain⁶. The intention of the mosque was to give Muslims in Britain a prayer space and an Islamic Cultural Center, so that they could conduct affairs pertaining to their faith. In 1944, a gift of two million pounds was accepted by a mosque committee comprising various prominent Muslim diplomats in Great Britain. World War II slowed down the building of the mosque, but once the war was over, Muslim nations, including Pakistan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, moved in unison to revive the original mosque project in Great Britain.

From 1954 to 1967, several designs for the mosque were under way and in 1969, an international design contest was created for architects to submit design proposals for the mosque. An English architect won the contest and began building the Regent's Park Mosque in London in 1974. It was completed in 1977, with the cost reaching 6.5 million pounds. Today, the mosque has become the focus of Islam and Muslims in the UK—among other roles, it accommodates 4,500 people for daily worship and provides an Islamic education for children. The Regent's Park Mosque plays a pivotal role

⁶ According the Regent's Park Mosque Web site.

in the establishment of almost every other mosque and Islamic institution in the UK. Its mission is to be the prime source of guidance, communication, and spiritual assistance, and to help build bridges of understanding and respect for Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK.

Sharia: The Source of Water in the Land

The first speaker at the Regent's Park Mosque seminar, Dr. Sunhaib Hasan, gave a lecture that focused on introducing Sharia—its meaning and interpretation. Hasan explained that Sharia as an Arabic term finds its root in “Shir'a,” the source of water in the land. Sharia does not just stand for Muslim law—as it is commonly understood—but rather, for the Muslim way of life. Sami Zubaida, (2003) a well-known scholar and expert on politics in the Muslim world, explains that Sharia is much more than a legal system for Muslims. “So much of its (Sharia) contents cover ritual and religious practice of prayer, alms, pilgrimage, diet and food taboos, and ‘purity’ regarding ritual washing and bodily functions, including sexual intercourse” (Zubaida, 2003, p. 11).

To explain the history of Sharia, Zubaida (2003) writes that the theological logic of the Sharia is that God had revealed his commandments for a pious life, and that these should constitute the norms for the life of believers, their families, societies and, ultimately, their governments (p. 10). These commandments are given, in part, in the Qur'an, the word of God, and in the narratives and utterances of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions. Theoretically, these sources constitute the bases for elaborate legal traditions,

known as *fiqh* (understanding), formulated by Islamic divines and jurists over the centuries, and subject to many mutations. The logic of applying the Sharia holds that the believer seeks virtue and salvation in living according to God's commandments. Equally, in Muslim thought, it is regarded as the duty of the ruler and government to apply God's law in their domains.

The last two points Zubaida (2003) makes summarize the two parts to which Sharia has traditionally been divided: the *ibadat*, or acts of worship, and the *mu'amalat*, or transactions. The "pillars of religion" constitute the acts of worship. As Zubaida (2003) briefly explains, these "pillars" include professing monotheism, daily prayers, fasting, alms-giving, and pilgrimage (p. 11). While these "acts of worship" consist mostly of interpersonal and inter-communal activities, the "transactions" part of the Sharia is what Williams' lecture focused on, as this part of the Sharia is relevant to public life. The transactions part of Sharia refers to social, environmental, economic, and political matters, such as behavior regarding personal laws, the family, the neighbor, and so forth (Nasr, 2002, p. 142).

It is important to note that, while Sharia is accepted as the way of life in most Muslim countries, the way in which Sharia is practiced and how it is used to govern varies from state to state. In Sunni Islam, there are four major schools of jurisprudence: Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafei. Most Shia Muslims follow the Jaafari school of thought. Many Muslims in the South Asian countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India—states from which many of the Muslims in Britain are from—follow the Hanafi school of thought.

For this project, it is not important to focus in-depth on each school of thought and how Sharia is followed in varying Muslim states, but rather to note the fact that because there are many different practices of Sharia, implementing uniform social and political laws under Sharia in a secular state is incredibly difficult, due to the many different interpretations of the divine law, even within the Muslim community. Another obstacle to consider when talking about adopting certain aspects of Sharia, specifically in Britain, is that in the UK alone, there are an estimated 70 to 100 Sharia councils (Dr. Samia Bano, personal communication, July 24, 2008). These councils, as Williams' made note in his lecture, have been practicing their specific form of Sharia within their own communities since their inception. How then, can we define a uniform Sharia that accommodates the many different interpretations and the already existing institutions in Britain? These questions, along with many others, are raised when the issue of an overlapping jurisdiction with Sharia in Britain is considered, but for this project, it is only important to recognize the complexities, not to try to solve them.

Sharia: The Overlapping Jurisdiction in Britain

For decades, the way in which British society understood its diversity was through the language of race relations, recognizing that Britain is a "multi-racial society." This was due to the state's diverse population, which brought about the political question of how best to ensure that immigrants, whose religious practices and cultural backgrounds were distinct from the host country's, might best integrate or be assimilated into British society (Fetzer &

Soper, 2005, p. 30). A number of scholars have noted that the guiding principle for British policy was multiculturalism. Under this regime, the state encouraged cultural groups to create their own organizational structures to safeguard their customs and religious practices as they saw fit, and to introduce an awareness of and celebration for Britain's cultural pluralism into the state education system. One tangible result of this, as Fetzer and Soper (2005) observe, was that many local schools in the 1960s began to pay greater attention to religions other than Christianity in the required religious education classes (p. 11). Britain also led the way in providing statutory protection against racial discrimination with the passage of the 1976 Race Relations Act. The act prohibited discrimination on "racial or ethnic grounds" and created the Commission for Racial Equality to take the lead on dealing with race relations. The government's race relation policy was, however, silent on the issue of religion (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 30). Absent a constitutional guarantee of religious rights, and without specific statutory protection, the state had a positive right to discriminate on the basis of religion. In practice, the Race Relations Act proved incapable of providing Muslims with the same protection it provided to other minorities in British society.

Michael Ipgrave, a scholar and professor at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), makes the argument that in a secularized environment, all people of faith are in some sense living as minorities. "Our communities face the challenge of integrating without assimilating—finding ways to play our part in British society while

maintaining distinctive religious identities,” he writes (Singh, 2002, p. 98). Ipgrave believes that in a society working toward community cohesion, religious minorities in Britain must ask themselves, what is essential for our religion, and what can be adapted to the British context? Yet Ipgrave makes it clear that authentic integration also calls for adjustments from society at large in order for that cohesion to become truly inclusive.

But when should these adjustments be made? Many multiculturalists suggest that every case in which a law or policy disparately impacts a religious or cultural practice constitutes an injustice. The argument is that, since the state cannot achieve a complete disestablishment of culture, it must make it up to citizens who are bearers of minority religious beliefs, so that their cultures are respected, and they are not discriminated against. In her book, *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, Sarah Song (2007), moves away from a fully multiculturalist view and agrees more with Ipgrave that community cohesion is not just dependent on state action, but is a two-way street involving the state and its citizens. Song writes that it is not enough to focus on the burdensomeness of laws and policies, rather that the question of injustice depends on the *kinds of interests* that are burdened and the *purpose of the law* imposing the burden (p. 67). We need to ask about the reasonableness on the burdens imposed. Reasonableness, Song (2007) writes, requires the willingness to seek fair terms of social cooperation and the acknowledgement that people disagree on fundamentals of religion and morality, which are differently burdened by generally applicable laws. For a

solution to acquire reasonableness, Song (2007) suggests evaluating cultural claims preceded by a dual test that weighs the groups' interest in the burdened practice and the state's interest in the law or policy (p. 67). The point is to ask whether the law impinges on something of fundamental interest to some individuals. The second part of the test asks about the rationale of the law or policy. If the rule serves no legitimate interest, then it should be revised, or perhaps even replaced. If the law serves a compelling public interest, then it must be weighed against the group's interest in the tradition or practice that is burdened by it (Song, 2007, p. 67).

In his lecture, Williams made the case that the way in which the civil law in Britain is set up for Muslims does in fact impinge on a fundamental interest of some Muslims. The rule, the archbishop argued, does not serve a compelling public interest because certain civil laws have already been adapted to faith-based practices in Britain and the public interest is not at stake in those, so why not allow others that are of fundamental interest to certain groups of people (Muslims) and have virtually no effect on outside groups (other faiths)?

To use the archbishop's exact words, in speaking to the BBC before his lecture about the adoption of Sharia (Appendix E), Williams said:

[...] certain provisions of Sharia are already recognized in our society and under our law; so it's not as if we're bringing in an alien and rival system; we already have in this country a number of situations in which the internal law of religious communities is recognized by the law of the land as justified conscientious objections in certain circumstances in providing certain kinds of social relations.

When Williams noted that “certain provisions of Sharia are already recognized” in British society, he was referring to practices such as Islamic banking, which a number of banks in the UK have accepted by tailoring current accounts and mortgages for Muslims according to Sharia (Suri, 2005). In fact, the UK is home to the first wholly Sharia-compliant retail bank in the West, the Islamic Bank of Britain, which was authorized by the Financial Services Authority in 2004. The FSA has also authorized the European Islamic Investment Bank, which is the first such investment bank. Now, as Williams states, Muslims are seeking to follow Sharia not only in inheritance and commercial matters, but also in family matters.

In his lecture, Williams mentioned that internal law in other religious communities is recognized by the British legal system. Britain has adopted a pragmatic approach to religious pluralism. While rights and privileges are not automatically extended to incoming groups, the pattern has been for the state to minimize conflict by eventually accommodating newly arrived religions (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 34). An example of this can be seen in the Jewish religious courts, the Beth Din. British Jews, particularly Orthodox Jews, frequently turn to the Beth Din to resolve civil disputes; it covers issues from business to divorce. Both sides in a dispute must be Jewish and must have agreed to have their case heard by the Beth Din. Once that has happened, the eventual decision is binding. English law states that any third party can be agreed by two sides to arbitrate in a dispute, and in this case the institutional third party is the Beth Din (Tarry, 2008). The Beth Din also takes care of a

multitude of Jewish community affairs: the dates of the Sabbath, kosher certification of caterers and bakers, medical ethics for Jewish patients and religious conversions (Tarry, 2008). But it is in the areas of divorce and litigation that the Beth Din acts as a court in the Western sense. Divorce, in Jewish law, takes place when a document called a Get, written out by a scribe in Aramaic and ancient Hebrew, is handed by the husband to the wife (Tarry, 2008). It is not legal the other way round, but both sides must agree to, and the wife has to accept the document if she wishes the divorce to proceed. This does not always have to be in person, and a court official can stand in for the husband as a legal proxy in particularly fraught cases. The service provided by the Beth Din is best described as binding civil arbitration, and British Jews insist they do not seek to replace the state's civil courts. The historical trend for the British government to accommodate religions has proved to be important leverage for Muslim groups to argue that the state should treat them as it treats other minority religious groups (Fetzer & Soper, 2005, p. 34).

British Muslim Marriages and Divorces

The Jewish Beth Din system is a prime example of what Williams' was suggesting for the Muslim communities in Britain. The recognition of civil dispute resolution within Sharia, not as a replacement of the state's civil courts, but as an overlapping jurisdiction, would help many Muslims in Britain to always be protected by the law. Due to the confusion surrounding Muslim civil law in Britain, sometimes Muslims are not aware of their rights

and therefore go without legal protection. Muslim marriages and divorces are the best example of this injustice.

In their study of Muslim marriages in Britain, Balchin and Warraich (2006) found that many women in Muslim communities believe that a marriage in a mosque or before an *imam* (leader of the mosque) in Britain constitutes a valid marriage. In the event of a dispute and an attempt to enforce their rights through the British courts, they are shocked to discover that, unless married in one of the very few mosques registered as places for civil ceremony, they are not validly married in the eyes of British law.

Through anecdotal evidence, Balchin and Warraich (2006) found that the problem arises because of a common misperception throughout Britain that “common law marriage” has in effect the same value as a Registry Office marriage (p. 3). Conversely, many women from Muslim communities in Britain and from South Asia presume that a marriage conducted abroad under foreign laws is somehow not “fully valid” in the eyes of British law. The Forced Marriage Unit has had several cases where girls forced into marriage abroad presumed their marriage was invalid and began the process of remarrying once safely returned to Britain. Balchin and Warraich (2006) note that these confusions are shared by British authorities, such as the police, support services, and even lawyers (p. 3). How then can Muslims living in Britain be law-abiding citizens if they, and the authorities, are unsure of their rights?

The same legal confusion carries over from marriage to divorce. If a Muslim couple has only married through a *nikah* ceremony (an Arabic marriage contract) conducted in Britain, since, in the first place, their marriage is not valid in the eyes of British law, the validity of their divorce in British law simply does not arise (Balchin & Warraich, 2006, p. 5). Women in such situations may be denied their financial rights from the marriage, specifically maintenance and inheritance. With no recourse to formal law, they are at the mercy of family members and social systems, which in practice, do not always uphold women's rights.

There are no statistical details, but it is presumed that the majority of Muslim couples in Britain were either married through a Registry Office in addition to a *nikah*, or a *nikah* performed abroad. There is then confusion as to how to dissolve such unions. Again, a civil divorce in Britain, whether of a valid *nikah* performed abroad or of a Registry marriage in Britain involving Muslims, is possible and valid and is generally recognized by, for example, the Pakistan courts.

Problems arise, however, when "Islamic" forms of divorce are used to dissolve a marriage that is valid under British law. Specifically problematic is the question of the validity of *talaq*—a controversial procedure whereby a divorce is made by saying "*talaq, talaq, talaq*" or "I divorce you," three times—the unilateral termination of marriage by the husband, or by the wife when she has been delegated this right in her marriage contract (Balchin & Warraich, 2006, p. 5). The validity of such a Muslim divorce depends upon

complex questions of where it was pronounced and where the procedure was completed and what form of dissolution was used before which forum. In the confusion created by these complexities, serious problems arise if one or more of the spouses are subject to two different legal systems, one of which recognizes the divorce while the other does not.

Many Muslims in the UK, those who understand the marriage and divorce process, choose to have a *nikah* ceremony and a civil ceremony because of the recognition of the status of being married which the civil ceremony bestows, as well as the protection that the domestic law provides in the event of a breakdown in the marriage. However, there are many Muslims who are unaware of this system, and, thus, there are tens of thousand of Muslims in Britain, as well as non-British spouses of British Muslims who may be in marriages or undergo divorces whose legal validity is doubtful in the eyes of the English courts and authorities such as immigration and pension services (Balchin & Warraich, 2006, p. v). As Balchin and Warraich (2006) write, the law and what it requires of people in order to have valid status is clear neither to Muslims in Britain and abroad nor to practitioners and commentators (p. v). This leaves many Muslims in a “married/un-married” limbo, often referred to in legal terms as “limping marriages” (Balchin & Warraich, 2006, p. v). On the whole, family law, as it is interpreted and applied in Britain today, shunts British Muslims out of the legal system rather than including them in a positive manner. When run against Song’s (2007) “test” mentioned above, the conclusion would be that in matters of marriage

and divorce, current British law impinges on the fundamental interests of many British Muslims and, therefore, should be revised.

What Williams Actually Said

The overarching problems in cases involving recognition of Muslim marriage and/or divorce are: a lack of knowledge regarding a law on the part of all actors; the lack of clarity in the law; the failure of the British legal system to respond to needs, and mutual mistrust between the British legal system and Muslims communities subject to that system. All of these problems leave Muslim communities in Britain feeling like outsiders, which presents a problem for community cohesion. Although these problems are vast and intricate, they are soluble. In order to solve them, however, they must first be recognized.

In his lecture, Williams attempted to open up one possible channel of informed debate with regard to law, identity and community in Britain. To hear more about the meaning of the archbishop's lecture, I met with Ian Edge, the director of the Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies and a lawyer specializing in Islamic law. Edge, who organized the archbishop's lecture, quickly escorted me into his office piled high with dictionary-like law books and cut right to the chase in a strong tone: "The controversy surrounding the archbishop's lecture is simply peculiar," he said. Edge felt the archbishop was clear that the implementation of Sharia would only go as far as the areas of Sharia that fit within the boundaries of English law. Edge stated:

His speech is saying that within the confines of English law, there may be a place for considering the application of Sharia as long as it is consistent with English law. He was very clear it had to be consistent with English law. He was asked about criminal law and he said he was not talking about criminal law. Islamic criminal law could never have a place in English law. He was very, very clear. Although some people chose not to interpret what he said as clear. (personal communication, July 9, 2008)

As Edge notes, the archbishop's lecture did not include talk of Sharia criminal law—the part of Sharia that is associated with punishments such as stoning and other practices that take place (in rare accounts) in so-called Islamic fundamentalist countries. Instead, Williams recognized that Muslim personal law has a place in English law—not as a parallel Sharia jurisdiction in competition with the English legal system or as subversive legal system designed to replace the English legal system, but in a valuable supplementary role that would help to alleviate the “married/un-married” limbo and some of the other problems mentioned above.

In July 2008, the then Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, Nicholas Phillips, made a public statement agreeing with the archbishop in his remarks about Sharia:

It was not very radical to advocate embracing Sharia Law in the context of family disputes, for example, and our system already goes a long way towards accommodating the archbishop's suggestion it is possible in this country for those who are entering into a contractual agreement to agree that the agreement shall be governed by a law other than English law. [...] There is no reason why principles of Sharia Law, or any other religious code, should not be the basis for mediation or other form of alternative dispute resolution. (Barrett, 2008)

In short, Williams' reference to the supplementary role Sharia might play in the British legal system is an overlapping jurisdiction that would help clarify

the questioning legalities around certain civil laws in British Muslim communities. This overlapping jurisdiction would represent Britain's respect for the diversity of its citizens and their wish for their religious and cultural practices to be recognized and respected alongside state civil courts. Williams was taking a step toward embracing multiculturalism in Britain and making the UK more inclusive for all its citizens.

Conclusion

The day after Williams gave his lecture, Lambeth Palace desperately attempted to mediate the controversy by issuing a statement on Williams' Web site saying that the implementation of Sharia was not his intention. "The archbishop made no proposals for Sharia and certainly did not call for its introduction as some kind of parallel jurisdiction to the civil law," it said. While contention in the media continued for a few weeks following the lecture, and then resurfaced in July 2008 when Lord Chief Justice Phillips (at the time) supported Williams' claims, the lecture and its meaning were largely dropped. I suspect the main reason for this involved the Anglican Church's desire to protect Williams' position as Archbishop of Canterbury against the many people within the church and elsewhere who were calling for his resignation. It did not seem as if anyone was prepared to combat the major controversy that surfaced, so to sweep it under the carpet seemed to be the best approach.

But the major issues Williams raised in "Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective" must not be forgotten. Perhaps Williams

was the wrong person to offer the insight provided in this much-needed lecture. The content of the lecture was touchy enough, but the Archbishop of Canterbury's offering the content only added fuel to the fire. The saying, "There is no such thing as bad press" might have applied to the archbishop's lecture, because it got people talking about the issues raised, but it was dropped much too quickly for any real progress or change to occur as an immediate product of the lecture.

Perhaps the best way to approach dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Western multicultural societies in a post-9/11, 7/7 climate is from a bottom-up approach rather than top-down. I saw this work first-hand through my friendship with Amal. Although we didn't know it at the time, through our conversations and friendship, Amal and I were taking part in what could be considered interfaith dialogue. When we talked, we explained our positions, asked each other questions for clarification, and debated our views and their moral implications. Eventually, through time, Amal and I established a common ground. At first our differences separated us, but now, I can see that they bring us closer together even though we are both back at home in Yemen and the U.S.

Sometimes when I think I have things figured out, I'll shoot Amal an e-mail to ask her what she thinks. In her e-mails back, she'll offer her advice, which is always peppered with words of encouragement. My friendship with Amal is a constant challenge, pushing me past my areas of comfort, forcing me to consider a view that is often the opposite of my own. But I have come

to value this challenge and see it as an important component of my work and worldview. This lesson, I think, must be realized on a larger, international level.

In her book, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenges of Interfaith Dialogue*, Jane Idleman Smith (2007) offers several ideas for making interfaith dialogue a more popular practice. While her book focuses on the U.S., many of the suggestions Idleman Smith (2007) puts forth could work in the British context, too.

The first suggestion Idleman Smith (2007) makes is to focus on fostering dialogues between Muslims and Christians at the local and national levels through respective organizations (p. 141). One organization that has done particularly well with this is the National Council of Churches of Christ/USA, which began formal interfaith work in the 1970s, and since the early 1990s, has had issues regarding Christian-Muslim relations consistently on the agenda. These issues include: working to set up local conversations, with the hope of developing regional and, finally, national dialogues; establishing specific guidelines for dialogue; setting up national consultation on Christian and Muslim understandings of law and human rights; and working with Muslims to counter negative media images of Islam (Idleman Smith, 2007, p. 143). The National Council of Churches of Christ/USA is just one example of many local, national and international organizations working to enhance dialogue across faiths from the bottom up in order to address issues of multiculturalism. Others include the International Association for

Religious Freedom in Oxford, the Interfaith Alliance in Washington, D.C., and Interfaith International in Geneva, Switzerland.

Other suggestions Idleman Smith (2007) offers include working on getting more women and children involved in interfaith dialogue (p. 146 & p. 150). The dialogue on interfaith relations has been dominated by men, thus leaving out the insights of many of those affected. Often, decisions about women are made in interfaith dialogue meetings, but women's voices are not heard. Idleman Smith (2007) offers several reasons for the lack of involvement of women: women are less publicly visible in Western Muslim communities; Muslim men tend not to encourage the participation of women; women are interested in different issues than men; in traditional cultures, women often do not engage in open conversation with men outside of their families; and women feel their comments are not taken seriously (p. 147). Many women in multicultural societies have resorted to organizing their own interfaith dialogue conversations between just women, but in order for their ideas to turn into action, collective, dual-gender meetings must be had. It is essential to find ways not only to bring more women into the conversation, but to tap their resources in helping to find new ways to develop interfaith cooperation.

The involvement of children in interfaith dialogue meetings is also essential. If children can learn to converse with others outside of their beliefs, a new generation of openness and acceptance can be fostered. Much of children involvement, however, depends on adult's willingness and drive to

encourage such dialogue. It is imperative that this ideology take hold in the 21st century.

It is really just a matter of time before the archbishop's message of the need for multicultural societies to discuss issues of contention between different cultures takes hold. This is not a message that can forever be ignored, due to immigration and the coming together of different cultures and political practices. It is the duty of all governments, especially in states governed by democracy—a form of government that presumes no person is superior to another—to consider the challenges presented by today's multicultural world.

With particular reference to the situation of Muslims in the democratic and secular societies of the West, Cesari (2004) states that it has been necessary to examine dimensions of Muslim life that are crucial to the formation of both identities and religious practices. "These dimensions are the meta-narrative currently circulating on Islam, the influence of the cultural and political structures of the host countries, the complex interaction between religion and ethnicity, and the influence of global Islam" (p. 175). If we accept that a democratic society is one in which citizens are owed equal standing and equal respect, then the above complexities must be taken into consideration in order for a democracy to run as intended.

This is imperative for equality, because so often cultural disadvantage can translate into economic and political disadvantage. Historically, members of the dominant linguistic and cultural community have advantages in all

sectors of life, from schools to the workplace, and in politics. Song (2007) writes that this has a normalizing effect, suggesting that one group's religion, language and customs are more valued than those of other groups (p. 62). More validity translates to more advantage in all parts of life. It is not an anomaly that many Muslim communities in Britain are affected by disadvantages such as poverty. All of this boils down to the larger question: Will non-Christians in Britain ever feel like full British citizens?

Today, in Britain, a new generation of Muslim leaders is in the process of shaking off the ethnically based and often isolationist version of Islam dominated by first-generation immigrants from the Indian subcontinent (Cesari, 2004, p. 178). This is taking place as new Muslim leaders want to step away from many right-wing Islamic principles, but these leaders are also following a trend of assimilation into Western philosophies (Cesari, 2004, p. 178). While many of these Muslim leaders have been British citizens their entire lives, thus growing into and accepting many Western philosophies, I argue that they should not *have* to completely assimilate into the philosophies of the West. There must be a compromise made between outside cultures and the state government. Concerning Muslims in the UK, in his lecture, Williams suggested that the Muslim cultural and religious practices that abide by British law should be recognized and accepted in the UK. If Muslims in Britain are forced to muffle or hide their cultural and religious identities, Britain will begin to lose its coveted identity as a “multicultural state.”

“Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective,” and the response it received, highlighted the tensions involving multiculturalism in the West. Current events such as this mark important moments in history that must be analyzed in order for social, cultural, and political progress to be made.