



## **CLEAR FOCUS PRODUCTIONS**

**Project: Open University**

**AD252 Islam in the West**

### ***Combating Extremism***

Narrator: Combating extremism has become a central ambition of the Sufi Muslim Council.  
Haras Rafiq.

HR: Radicalisation extremism within the Muslim community is nothing new. We know it's been here for at least 200 years. As Sufi's we've been fighting this for 200 years, but internally. There is a struggle going on for the very soul of Islam, which has had an impact on everybody else. So that's something we really have to understand. In terms of how we're combating it, we really are taking templates. We're really taking activities, functions, skills that Sufi's have been using for 200 years to combat that. And I'll give you an example of some of these.

The first thing one has to do is to recognise the first signs of how somebody has been radicalised. A friend of mine's son went to University to study medicine. The second year at medicine, he came home. And he decided that he wasn't going to eat any of the food that his father was putting on the table, because he felt his father was an apostate and a heretic. Because his father was celebrating the prophet on his birthday. So recognising these signs are important.

So first of all we help to recognise them. Then we deliver a spiritual essence of Islam. Things like the vicar. Things like the artistic side. Things like spiritual road. Things like going back to the original translations and interpretations of the Koran and Hadif. Things like getting people happy rather than angry. The prophet Peacuponum said 'the lowest form of charity is a smile'. He never said 'Make somebody sad'. He never said 'Go and attack people for no reason'. So really it's focussing on the spiritual aspects. Taking the best practices that we've had over the last couple of hundred years and delivering them through the network of institutions that we have already. And I think that one of the biggest problems facing the Muslim community is to not become too introverted, and not to become victims. And by becoming introverted, and by becoming victims, help to give people who don't understand Islam. People who don't like Muslims. Because there are people extremists on the other side. More ammunition against us. So I think the whole concept around social cohesion, there are concepts about being positive members of society. Practicing Islam and not being anti west. And not being anti anybody. And really reaching that spiritual level of being at ease with one's faith. Because let's look at what the word 'Islam' means. And there are different translations and interpretations. But the one that's most common is to surrender to one deity and attain inner peace. And that inner peace is something that I think if we're not careful we are going to lose our [one word].

Narrator: That fear sharpens the need for good inter faith relations at leadership and grass roots levels. Phil Lewis.

PL: Take Christian Muslim relations. For 30 years the mainstream churches have had people like me inter faith advisors helping them relate to the other communities. Whoever those other communities were. And I think over that time, say a Bishop or whatever church leader you have in a given area, has developed levels of trust with what one might call the Muslim leadership at a city level. And that's important. It's important to be seen to be relating to Muslim leaders. Political and religious and business leaders. But I think there's been a level of frustration in that that relationship doesn't reach down into the community. And one of the problems has been Mosque personnel, Imam's, who neither had the training. Didn't understand English. Has been imported so to say from somewhere else. And were not expected by the Mosque committee's to have a public and civic role. Again, we often assume

the Imam of the Mosque is rather like an Anglican vicar. Has a public and civic role. Generally he does not. He's paid simply to teach children and to preach. And therefore there was a level of expectation among local clergy, that they would knock at the Mosque door and they'd find so to say a Muslim vicar. Who would share their concerns for wider society? Work together on issues of the common good. Prostitution. Juvenile delinquency. Drugs. But that hasn't happened. Or until very recently. Now it's beginning to change. And one precondition are Imam's who are re trained in Britain. But that of itself I don't think is a sufficient factor. What we're finding are the people who do understand the concerns of local clergy, are Imam's who have moved out of a Muslim enclave and have become hospital chaplains, prison chaplains or RE teachers for instance. To give three examples of local people I know. All of these three men have developed new social and intellectual skills, to relate to wider society. So they are natural allies. They understand the concerns Christian clergy have. So I think there is now a window of opportunity at a local level to begin to relate. And I think there is some very very productive developments nationally. In January of 2006, the Christian Muslim Forum launched at Lambeth Palace. And Rowan Williams is the founder patron of that. And it came after a four year process of research by Muslims and Christians, whether there was a need for a national body. And they visited a whole series of British cities, talking to Christians, Muslims, policy makers. Out of that extended research, there was a broad agreement; there was a need for a national body. That national body is focussing not so much of theological exchange, but enabling practical collaboration at city level. So they have six working parties, a Christian and a Muslim. And they will be addressing issues of media, public policy, education, youth. And the aim is to as it were to kick start or to deepen local patterns of collaboration. So recently 30-40 young Imams met with 30 or 40 Christians in a residential. The first residential there's been in Britain for clergy and Imams. So that's where a national body can kick start a national initiative which can strengthen the local. So to that extent I think we're moving into a new phase of inter faith relations. Where it's no longer simply at a city level or a national level. Which is important enough. Symbolically and practically. But in a way the test case now for inter faith relations, Christian Muslim relations. Will be their success in being imbedded in localities. And I am cautiously optimistic that shift is taking place.

Narrator: But while Tariq Ramadan sees good work going on at the grass roots, he has reservations about the emergence of a tier of inter faith specialists.

TR: They are travelling from one conference to another. Speaking about common values, Christianity and Islam and Judaism and Buddhism. And they come back and there is nothing set to their communities. It's useful. It's not going to work like that. It's really something which is a business, and in fact far from the reality. And we have to come to something which are conditions, true conditions for inter faith dialogue. And the first one is we need to come to a better understanding of our respective text. Second is, and it's also something which is important to improve the situation, is not for the Muslims to say what the Christians believe or not for the Christians to say what the Muslims believe. You can read the texts of the other. But you have to listen to what the others have to say about their own texts, and they way they understand that. And it should not only be a dialogue. It should be working together. What we need now is questions, Jews, Muslims, Atheists. Because atheists and seculars should be part of this inter faith [one word]. They are part of the production of values in our society. So they should be involved. And if we want to reach the people and to understand how much we have in common, let us come to very practical things, like this one. Like for example first marriages. Muslims should see that they have to come together, to have a very strong public voice. Just to say 'we don't accept that altogether'. So common commitment to our values and our ethics. And this has to be visible. Not among specialists, far from the realities of our society.

Male: In so far as western societies can acknowledge and affirm their Christian heritage, they will be able to engage with Islam.

Narrator: Finally, I asked Phil Lewis how the form that secularism takes can make a big difference to how easily Muslims can settle into western societies.

PL: The hard secular stance historically is France, Belgium, Holland. Which basically excludes or seeks to exclude religion from public and civic life. You have basically a powerful centralised state, is only willing to do business with the individual citizen. And notionally doesn't want intermediate bodies between the citizen and the state. And therefore wants to privatise religion.

In that context, Islam as indeed Christianity, is not a private religion. It has community and civic implications. So there's endless potential for conflict there.

If we take the English situation, which is not a pure sort of soft secularism by any means. But a soft secular does not want to privilege any one religion. But not to disadvantage religious traditions. Now, many would say because English society has learned to cope with it's own Christian diversity, unlike France never really had Christian diversity as a powerful catholic church. Britain has always had significant Christian diversity. Catholic and free churches. And therefore insofar as Christianity in Britain has come to terms of it's own internal diversity, it has far less problems, as church or state in coping with religion otherness. So I think any society which is at ease with it's own Christian heritage is going to make a reasonable stab at incorporating Muslims. If you have a doctrinaire secularism, a hard secular ideology, that's going to produce enormous difficulties for the Muslim communities being incorporated in their states.