

International Council of Christians and Jews

# Muslim Jewish relations in an increasingly secular Europe

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# Presentation outline

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# Speaker details

- David Berkley is a barrister and mediator. He was born in Israel and educated at Gateshead Yeshiva and Manchester University. David is a founding member of the Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester and is currently President of the Zionist Central Council of Greater Manchester.
- Mohammed Amin is the Treasurer of the Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester and Vice Chairman of the Conservative Muslim Forum. He writes and speaks regularly on interfaith issues, Islamic finance and politics; his website [www.mohammedamin.com](http://www.mohammedamin.com) is growing in readership. Before retirement he was a tax partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. He is speaking in a personal capacity.

# Common external pressures

# Common external pressures growing

- Shechita / Halal slaughter
  - Attempted ban in Netherlands
- Circumcision
  - Recent German court decision
- Redefinition of marriage
- Faith schools
- Clothing restrictions
- Post mortems
- Secularised societies not respecting religious beliefs

# The communities' resources

- Electoral numbers
- Membership of legislatures
- Media presence
- Relative balance differs from country to country
- Combined lobbying always more effective

# Barriers to cooperation

# Problematic religious texts

O YOU who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies: they are but allies of one another- and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes, verily, one of them; behold, God does not guide such evildoers.

Quran 5:51 Muhammad Asad translation

# Problematic religious texts

Thou wilt surely find that, of all people, the most hostile to those who believe [in this divine writ] are the Jews as well as those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught beside God;.....

Quran 5:82 Muhammad Asad translation

# Problematic religious texts

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before thee, the Hittite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; and when the LORD thy God shall deliver them up before thee, and thou shalt smite them; then thou shalt utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them; neither shalt thou make marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

# Problematic religious texts

For he will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and He will destroy thee quickly. But thus shall ye deal with them: ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be His own treasure, out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 Jewish Print Society 1917 translation

# Problematic religious texts

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, making sport. Wherefore she said unto Abraham: 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.' And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son.

Genesis 21:9-11 Jewish Print Society 1917 translation

# Importation of Middle East conflict

- European Muslims / Jews view the conflict differently
- Massive barrier to cooperation
  - Both communities need to learn to compartmentalise

# The Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester

# Creation

- Initial meetings 2004
- Company limited by guarantee incorporated 14 June 2005
- Resolutely focused on Greater Manchester

[www.muslimjewish.org.uk](http://www.muslimjewish.org.uk)

# Memorandum states legal objects

The objects for which the Forum is established are to develop the cultural and social ties between the Muslim and Jewish Communities of Greater Manchester; to educate members of the Muslim and Jewish Communities in relation to their shared values and common Abrahamic tradition, heritage, history and culture; and to promote better understanding within the wider community of the interests and values that are common to the Muslim and Jewish Communities.

# Declaration of principles (1)

- We are a non-political organisation that seeks to develop close cultural and social ties between the Muslim and Jewish Communities of Greater Manchester.
- We acknowledge the diversity of views within each of our communities.
- We recognise and respect those points upon which we do not agree.
- We wish to celebrate our shared values and common Abrahamic tradition.
- We wish to promote a better mutual understanding of our respective faiths (to include heritage, history and culture) within our communities and to the wider community.
- We recognise that the means, by which we would seek to promote such understanding, should include the development of links between our youth members and students at local schools, colleges and universities through social, educational, sporting and other activities.
- We wish to develop links and maintain interest groups for specific sectors of our communities to be represented.

# Declaration of principles (2)

- We wish to protect the interests of the Jewish and Muslims communities which including:
  - The right to hold religious beliefs
  - The right to manifest religious practices
  - The retention of religious humane methods of animal slaughter for food in the United Kingdom
  - Campaigning for faith schools
  - The retention of male circumcision
  - The right to have religious observances respected by public bodies and the wider community
  - The provision of acceptable methods of post mortem examinations
- We oppose:-
  - All forms of religious intolerance and bigotry
  - All forms of violence and aggression targeted at innocent non-combatants
  - All form of racism and xenophobia including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

# MJF - brief history

- Initial membership very skewed
  - More Jews wanted to talk to Muslims than vice versa.
- Muslim attendance plummeted during wars
  - 2006 Lebanon war, 2009 Gaza conflict
- From simplicity (shared festivals) to complexity (business networking)
- Growing Muslim (and Jewish) participation

# From instrumentalism to friendship

- Informal trips to Auschwitz, Granada, Marrakech
- Dinners in each other's homes
- Growth of mutual trust
  - Greater ability to discuss Middle East

# A look at the UK and Europe

# The rest of the UK

- Some groups in both religions avoid the other community
- Growing level of cross religious contact as the UK Muslim community matures and feels more settled
- Relative quietness of Middle East dispute has helped

# Major countries of Europe

- Detailed inventory impractical
- Interaction level depends the Muslim community's level of self confidence (or lack of it)
- Importation of Middle East dispute the greatest problem
- Growing number of initiatives
  - Paris group Shalom Paix Salam! just visited Manchester

# Conclusions

- Each community needs to understand its own religious texts.
- The Middle East is not in Europe.
- Keep it simple
  - Visiting mosques, synagogues, festivals
- Keep it practical
  - Talks about divorce issues, inheritance law etc.
- Building trust takes time