

THE Woolf INSTITUTE of Abrahamic Faiths

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Executive Summary

There is a growing consensus among those involved in Jewish, Christian and Islamic seminary education in the UK that curricula for training future rabbis, priests and imams must seriously consider the multi-cultural and multi-faith nature of our society by providing courses about religions other than their own. This will not only help to build effective religious leadership but will also contribute more effectively to community cohesion.

Consequently, we need to understand what is presently taught in this area, as well as to discuss the minimum level of knowledge religious and community leaders require about the religious 'other'. This pilot survey, funded by the Alliance Foundation and undertaken by Sheikh Michael Mumisa and Dr Edward Kessler, is the first study of its type to explore the issue in the UK. It provides a survey of the seminaries offering courses on other religions, but more detailed research is required, including an examination of how such courses are taught.

Most Islamic institutions training imams in the UK currently fail to prepare their students for positive participation in multi-cultural and multi-faith Britain. The curriculum is based on a passive close reading of texts from a medieval past which, if studied without consideration of the socio-historical context in which they were produced and of our own contemporary multi-faith context, can lead to misguided zeal and fanaticism. Moreover, the recapitulation of South Asian Barelwi and Deobandi narratives and polemics on British soil have produced culturally limited and hard-line Indian and Pakistani ways of interpreting Islam in British cities.¹

However, there are a small number of Islamic colleges (focusing on postgraduate studies) which provide high quality educational programmes that take into account the diversity of twenty-first century Britain.

Mainstream Christian denominations agree that courses about other religions should be provided, but the quality, number and optional/compulsory content of such courses vary significantly. Some Christian seminaries feel that Judaism and Islam should be studied from a Christian-centred perspective for the primary purpose of evangelising, while others invite Jewish and Muslim scholars to teach their own religions from an insider's perspective.²

While rabbinic students at the Progressive Leo Baeck College in London are taught interfaith dialogue and are expected to attend a compulsory interfaith conference in Germany at least once before their graduation, no actual courses or modules about other religions are offered as part of the curriculum. Orthodox Rabbinic colleges, on the other hand, do not yet offer any courses on interfaith dialogue as part of rabbinic training, and ultra-orthodox colleges are wholly uninterested.

All seminaries contacted complain about pressure on curriculum, making it difficult to accommodate new courses such as interfaith relations. For example, Jewish and Islamic seminaries argue that their strong emphasis on reading and studying texts in their original languages (Hebrew and Arabic) makes it difficult to accommodate extra subjects on other religions. Similar problems exist in Christian seminaries, where some educationists feel that the curriculum is too crowded to accommodate the study of other religions. When such courses are taught they are therefore often available only as optional modules, attracting few students.

In our view, curriculum pressures are insufficient justification for failing to prepare religious and community leaders for life and ministry in contemporary British society. All ministers of religion – imams, priests, rabbis and other religious leaders – need to receive a training that is relevant for today’s multi-cultural and multi-faith Britain.

Key Findings

1. Islamic Seminaries

1.1 Courses on understanding other religions are not offered in any of the traditional Islamic seminaries in the UK. Although individual scholars in some seminaries may occasionally participate in interfaith activities, there is still opposition to providing courses on Judaism or Christianity. In cases where Christianity has been discussed, the polemical nineteenth-century text *Izharul Haq* (Truth Revealed) or other texts written in refutation of Christianity are used.

1.2 Sometimes discussions about Judaism and Christianity take place in classes on *Tafsir* (Qur’anic Exegesis), *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), and *al-Firaq wa al-Adyan* (Sects and Other Religions), usually from a polemical perspective. Since the curriculum is traditional, discussions about followers of other religions are generally negative and are often based on the classical and medieval Muslim constructions of Jews and Christians.

1.3 The study of classical and medieval texts in their original Arabic is seen by a majority of Muslims as essential in the training of imams and Islamic scholars. Most universities in the UK are not equipped or prepared to offer training or studies in such texts at undergraduate level since not all students taking Islamic studies degrees plan to be Islamic scholars. Thus, most Muslim students aspiring to be Islamic scholars or imams prefer to be trained, not at British universities, but at the many independent traditional Islamic seminaries operating in the UK or in the Muslim world. This

means that they are deprived of the contemporary scholarship and key tools necessary for reading and interpreting classical and medieval Islamic texts in twenty-first century Britain.

1.4 Islamic academic institutions offering postgraduate Islamic studies validated by British universities currently provide the most suitable training for imams in multi-cultural and multi-faith Britain. Unfortunately, such institutions have been slow or unwilling to establish working links with the traditional Islamic seminary sector to offer their academic expertise and advice on developing a suitable curriculum. Instead they use the traditional Islamic seminaries as reservoirs from which to attract students for their postgraduate programmes. Such students generally find it hard to adjust from the educational setting of a traditional Islamic seminary to a postgraduate academic culture within the one year (full-time) or two years (part-time) of the MA programmes. Thus, they do not select optional modules on, for example, 'Islam and Interfaith Relations' or 'Islam and Pluralism', opting instead for familiar traditional Islamic subjects.

2. Christian Seminaries

2.1 Mainstream Christian seminaries in the UK benefit from their historical intellectual links with British universities. Not only has it been easier to validate their seminary programmes with major British universities; they have also been able to draw upon the expertise of the universities' theology departments in the study of other religions.

2.2 Although theologians from mainstream Christian denominations in the UK agree that modules about other religions should be provided in Christian seminaries, there is uncertainty as to how and on what basis such modules should be taught. On the one hand, the more evangelical colleges tend to prefer courses taught from a Christian-centred theological perspective with the primary purpose of evangelising; on the other, more liberal colleges prefer to teach other religions with the primary purpose of promoting understanding and dialogue.

2.3 Generally, the majority of Christian seminaries which offer studies in either Interfaith Relations or the Study of Judaism and Islam provide them as optional modules. Although some seminaries offer a compulsory course on World Religions³, this has failed adequately to cover the most important aspects of such religions in the time allocated.

2.4 Although most Christian seminaries have yet to find a way to incorporate core modules on other religions into the seminary curriculum, there is evidence that interfaith activities are a core part of the pastoral training programme. Some graduates from the seminaries have gone on to undertake postgraduate studies on either Judaism or Islam at universities.

3. Jewish Seminaries

3.1 Until 2006, Orthodox Rabbis did not pay particular attention to either interfaith relations or the study of other religions. The main focus of seminary education has been on the intellectual and spiritual development of a rabbi rather than on relations with other faiths (or even pastoral studies, which are also given little attention).

3.2 There are individual exceptions, such as Chief Rabbi Sacks who has always taken a personal interest in interfaith relations, especially relations with Christianity. He also recently appointed a rabbinic advisor on relations with Muslims and is seeking to increase the priority of interfaith relations in rabbinic training. However, since the only UK Orthodox rabbinic college closed in 2004, Orthodox rabbis tend to be trained outside the UK, where they are likely to receive little or no education about other faiths. It remains to be seen whether relations with other faiths will form part of ongoing ministerial training.

3.3 Like their Islamic seminary counterparts, where Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish students study medieval texts which mention Christianity and Islam, they generally do so from an apologetic perspective.

3.4 Interfaith studies are a core part of the curriculum in the largest Jewish Progressive Rabbinic College in Europe (Leo Baeck College). Students are not allowed to graduate as rabbis until they have attended a compulsory annual one-week residential Jewish-Christian-Muslim interreligious dialogue programme/conference in Germany. This programme has been running for thirty years. Other courses on interfaith relations are offered as options to rabbinic students.

Recommendations

We make the following recommendations on the basis of this pilot survey:

- **Twining of Jewish, Christian and Islamic seminaries:**

Greater interreligious encounter and intellectual exchanges between the different seminaries and colleges are needed in order to foster dialogue and better understanding between Jewish, Christian and Muslim seminarians. Personal encounters are vital. Meeting and interacting with people from different religious backgrounds moves beyond just learning about each other's traditions. An encounter opens up the possibility of understanding the variety of ways in which faith influences the life and practice of the 'other'.

- **The role of postgraduate Muslim institutions in improving academic standards in traditional Islamic seminaries:**

Encourage postgraduate Muslim academic educational institutions to establish working links with traditional Islamic seminaries. Most traditional Islamic seminaries in Britain mistrust British universities and academics. There is also a perception among many of those involved in the training of imams in the UK that British universities are biased towards Christian seminaries. With some notable exceptions (e.g. University of Loughborough, University of Gloucestershire, and University of Middlesex), most British universities have been unwilling to work with Islamic seminaries in the same way they have worked with Christian seminaries. Postgraduate Muslim academic educational institutions (such as Markfield Institute of Higher Education in Leicester and Al-Maktoum Institute in Aberdeen) should be encouraged to establish stronger working links with traditional Islamic seminaries to provide the same support that Christian seminaries receive from British universities.

- **The need to develop a common curriculum on what should be taught about other religions:**

Establish an agreed common curriculum providing a minimum level of knowledge that a religious leader should possess about other religions. A suggestion for a curriculum is attached in the appendix. The curriculum should differentiate between teaching introductory courses about other religions and providing 'interfaith' education. It needs to provide both.

- **The need for further research on the topic:**

Produce a more detailed study. Since the current pilot research project has been based mainly on interviews with seminary educationists and copies of the curricula received from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim seminaries, a more detailed study is required in order to find out what is actually taught and how. For example, the increasing profile of Islamic political movements means that Islam is considered 'high profile'. Thus, if courses on Islam are provided in

Christian and Jewish seminaries, they tend to focus on politically motivated development and not on how Muslims understand their religion. Similarly, Muslim seminarians need to reconcile the classical and medieval Islamic textual representations of Jews and Christians with how Jews and Christians understand their respective religions.



Introduction

1.1. Aims of the research

This report describes a pilot research project by the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths. It aims:

- To examine the curriculum and studies on the religious ‘other’ in the UK’s Jewish, Christian and Islamic seminaries. What teaching is offered about other religions and how is it presented? How prepared are graduates from the UK’s seminaries to engage in interfaith and interreligious dialogue?
- To define Islamic seminaries and their graduates. While there may exist a basic understanding of the purpose of Christian and Jewish seminaries, there is some confusion regarding the Islamic seminary system and the status or role of its graduates in Muslim communities in the UK.
- To make recommendations for action.

1.2. Context of the research

In April 2006 a debate emerged in the media and in Parliament after it was reported that some Islamic seminaries in London were teaching Muslim students ‘to despise unbelievers as filth’.⁴ On 10 April 2007 the Siddiqui report *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future*, to which one of the authors of the current research served as an advisor, was submitted to Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education. It was publicly launched on 4 June 2007.

Although there was no direct link between the Siddiqui report and the media reports on Islamic seminaries in 2006, some of the issues that emerged during the Siddiqui research emphasised the need for an independent study on curriculum about the ‘other’ in UK seminaries. During the meetings and discussions on the Siddiqui report, it was felt that a government-sponsored project could not consider questions about, or make recommendations on, curriculum and studies in private religious seminaries.

There have been a few recent studies on Islamic seminaries in South Asia (particularly Pakistan) following the publication of the 9/11 Commission Report in the US. However, they have focused narrowly on what is believed to be the link between some religious schools (*madrasas*) in Pakistan and ‘violent extremism’.⁵ Moreover, there has been a tendency, especially within some sections of the UK media, to exaggerate the link between the UK *madrasas* and ‘violent extremism’. Whether the link between UK *madrasas* and ‘violent extremism’ is real or imagined, there are clear cultural, intellectual and ideological links between most UK Islamic seminaries and their South Asian counterparts. For example, most of the teachers in UK Islamic seminaries graduated from Indian and Pakistani seminaries, and the curriculum taught in the UK is a slightly modified version of that in South Asian seminaries.

Another focus of debate in the UK has been the financial links between some colleges and some Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Such links have forced some of the Islamic seminaries to adopt positions which oppose interreligious dialogue in the UK between Muslims and others.

A small pilot project is in its very nature limited in scope. Nevertheless, it is clear that 1) The curriculum taught in almost all Islamic seminaries is a slightly modified version of the curriculum in Muslim countries. 2) Most of the teachers also graduated from seminaries in Islamic countries. 3) The Islamic seminary curriculum is based primarily on reading set classical and medieval texts and their commentaries.

However, further research is required to investigate in detail the contents of the texts and their commentaries, alongside interviews of students, graduates and teachers. Since the method of study and teaching in Islamic seminaries is passive reception of information from texts and teacher, it is important to investigate the link between pedagogical methodology, the ideological setting of the seminary system, and perceptions about the 'other' in UK Muslim communities.

2.1. Teaching about the ‘Other’: the Training of Rabbis

Leo Baeck College in London is the largest Progressive Rabbinic College in Europe. It offers a five-year full-time rabbinic programme. According to Rabbi Professor Saperstein, the College’s Principal, rabbinic students at the College ‘study Jewish texts from the past in their original languages in accordance with the critical techniques of contemporary scholarship’.

Interfaith dialogue is included in the second and third years of the curriculum and before graduating students must have attended a compulsory one-week residential Jewish-Christian-Muslim interreligious dialogue programme and a Jewish-Christian Bible study week. This is organised by:

- Leo Baeck College, London
- Ökumenische Werkstatt Wuppertal
- Deutsche Muslim-Liga Bonn, Bonn
- Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, University of Birmingham
- The Bendorf Forum.

Apart from these two dialogue programmes, students also take a compulsory module on Jews in Islamic lands, which includes a brief exploration of Islamic influences on Judaism.

There has been no Orthodox rabbinical seminary in the UK since 2004, when Jews College (which opened in 1855 for the training of rabbis) was renamed London School of Jewish Studies and changed into a provider solely of Jewish community education. According to Rabbi Shindler, who is responsible for in-service training of Orthodox rabbis and sits on the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue, even when Jews College trained rabbis, interfaith relations did not appear in the curriculum. Rabbi Shindler calls this a ‘laissez-faire’ attitude. Hardly any Orthodox rabbis have received training in interfaith relations.

Orthodox (and ultra-Orthodox) Jewish students study at yeshiva, normally in London, Manchester or Gateshead, to acquire traditional Jewish learning ‘for its own sake’ rather than to train as rabbis. Many young people study at yeshiva after the school day (or on weekends) or after they finish secondary education, before going on to pursue a secular career. Those who wish to pursue more traditional Jewish learning and more advanced Jewish study tend to leave the UK and study in *yeshivot* in Israel or the United States. Like their Muslim counterparts, where Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish students study medieval texts which mention Christianity and Islam, they generally do so from an apologetic perspective.

Until the last couple of years, Orthodox rabbis have not paid particular attention to interfaith relations. Since their training has been intellectual rather than hands-on, the pastoral dimensions of the role of rabbi (including relating to other faiths) have been relegated in importance in comparison with study and academic learning. Interfaith relations have therefore been low on the list of priorities.

However, the Chief Rabbi has recently indicated that this is no longer acceptable and the role of interfaith relations has taken on a new importance. Although Chief Rabbi Sacks has always taken a personal interest in interfaith relations, especially relations with Christianity, he recently appointed a rabbinic advisor to relations with Muslims, Rabbi Brawer, and seeks to push the issue higher up the list of priorities for rabbis to consider.

In 2006, the Chief Rabbi appointed an interfaith advisor, Ms Leonie Lewis, to review the in-service training of rabbis and to consider what ‘hands-on’ training – including interfaith relations – is required. According to Leonie Lewis:

The Chief Rabbi's Office has established a couple of opportunities for interfaith conversations with rabbis... The Office has been actively promoting the 'Side by Side' agenda with local communities and particularly with Jewish youth organisations where the Chief Rabbi is President.⁶

In sum, until the last couple of years, Orthodox rabbis were left to get on with their rabbinical role, and interfaith encounter was not a concern. Occasionally an Orthodox rabbi took an interest in interfaith relations (e.g. Rabbi Dr Norman Solomon) but this was the exception rather than the rule.

2.2. Teaching about the ‘Other’ in the Cambridge Theological Federation, St Mary’s College (Oscott) and the Queens Foundation for Ecumenical and Theological Education in Birmingham

The **Cambridge Theological Federation** brings together theological colleges from a wide range of Christian denominations. The courses provided by the member colleges and centres are either validated by or taught on behalf of the University of Cambridge or Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. **The Queens Foundation for Ecumenical and Theological Education** in Birmingham works in collaboration and partnership with the Church of England, the Methodist Church, Anglicans in World Missions, the United Reformed Church, and the Department of Theology at the University of Birmingham. **St Mary’s College, Oscott in Birmingham** is a Roman Catholic seminary which offers a six-year theological formation programme with ordination to the diaconate at the end of the fifth year. Courses are validated by the University of Birmingham and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in the Netherlands.

Both the Queens Foundation and St Mary’s jointly offer a course on World Religions which introduces students to ‘non-Christian faiths’. However, the focus and emphasis of the ecumenical programme at both theological seminaries remain the inter-denominational study of Christianity. St Mary’s College has in the past initiated an innovative programme of visiting and inviting students and teachers from the traditional Islamic seminaries in Birmingham to discuss Islam and interfaith studies.

It was evident from our study that all mainstream Christian denominations in the UK agree that courses about other religions should be provided. However, courses differ depending on theological perspectives. For example, some feel that Judaism and Islam should be studied from a Christian-centred perspective, primarily for the purpose of evangelising, while others emphasise that Jewish and Muslim scholars should be invited to teach their own religions from an insider’s perspective.

On residential courses for those preparing for ordained ministry, Islam is considered ‘high profile’ and there is less interest in Judaism and other religions. The Cambridge Theological Federation offer a small number of optional modules such as ‘Inter-Faith Dialogue’ and ‘World Faiths’ which explore ‘how Christian ministry can best be expressed in today’s pluralist context’. They also provide two intensive courses on Judaism, Islam and other faiths. Some Members of the Cambridge Theological Federation expect their ordinands to undertake an intensive course on another faith, while others recommend but do not compel students to study such courses.

Many staff, concerned with the lack of time in ministerial formation, argue that even less time should be given to learning about other religions and ‘more time should be spent studying our own Christian faith’.⁷

2.3 Teaching about the ‘Other’ in Islamic Seminaries in the UK

There are three types of independent Islamic colleges in the UK that offer advanced Islamic studies and train imams:

2.3.1. Traditional Islamic seminaries, called Darul Uloom (Arabic for ‘House of Knowledge’) or Hawza Ilmiyya (Persian for ‘seminary’), which are the largest in number, well funded (by local sources or from overseas) and close-knit. Unlike Jewish and Christian institutes discussed in this report, the curriculum of almost all the Islamic seminaries in the UK is not validated or recognised by any academic body in the UK. Islamic seminary curriculum is based on a study of classical and medieval texts in their original Arabic. The study of such texts is usually approached from a traditional, and in some cases confessional, perspective. Recently (2008) a new Islamic seminary/college in London (Ebrahim College) has successfully developed a groundbreaking ‘hybrid’ undergraduate programme with the University of Gloucestershire that combines the traditional study of classical and medieval Islamic texts within contemporary Western academic scholarship, alongside an introductory study of other religions. It is still too early to judge how successful this programme will be in addressing the challenges faced by graduates from the UK’s Islamic seminaries.

2.3.2 Islamic colleges such as the Islamic College for Advanced Study and the above-mentioned Ebrahim College, both in London, offer undergraduate degrees in Islamic studies often validated by UK universities. Currently only Middlesex University validates both a BA and an MA programme (offered by the Islamic College for Advanced Studies).

2.3.3. Islamic academic institutions such as Markfield Institute of Higher Education in Leicestershire, Muslim College in London, and Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Dundee, which offer primarily postgraduate programmes validated by British universities and are the smallest in number. There are currently only three such institutions in the whole of the UK. The postgraduate programmes at Markfield Institute of Higher Education are currently validated by the University of Loughborough and the University of Gloucestershire. The Muslim College in London offers a number of courses in collaboration with Birkbeck College. The MA, MPhil and PhD degrees at Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies are validated by the University of Aberdeen. This category of Islamic academic institutions offers the best prospects for developing a curriculum suitable for training imams in multi-faith and multi-cultural Britain. In order to cement their credibility and identity with British universities as ‘academic’ institutions, some of the postgraduate Islamic institutions have been unwilling to work closely with traditional Islamic seminaries.

3. An Outline Islamic Seminaries in the UK

3.1. Islamic teaching in the Darul Uloom traditional seminaries is based on a medieval curriculum developed in the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. Students (all male) spend between six and eight years reading and studying classical and medieval texts in Arabic. Teaching is usually confined to a passive transmission of ideas and theories from the texts, classical jurists and theologians. The curriculum encourages Muslims to believe that Jews and Christians are enemies, condemned to perish in hell.

Teachers, textbooks and, in some cases, even students are carefully selected on the basis of their ideological and theological affiliation. In most cases, teaching staff come from a specific ethnic group (and White and Black Muslim teachers are rarely employed).

The Darul Uloom are very influential and trusted by a large number of Muslims to produce imams for mosques and to provide communal leadership. However, there is also a growing sense in Muslim communities that the seminary curriculum fails to equip its graduates with the knowledge and tools needed to reinterpret Islam in contemporary pluralist societies.

3.2. This led to the emergence of independent Islamic colleges, some of whom offer BA honours degrees in Islamic studies validated by universities. Because such colleges are established and funded by traditional Muslim communities with their own ideologies (in some cases funding comes from overseas) there is a huge variety in quality. There is an inherent tension in the structure of these colleges as to whether they should primarily function as independent academic institutions or (at the behest of their financial sponsors) simply disseminate propaganda and/or proselytise.

As a result, the content of the undergraduate programme remains reliant on the traditional seminary curriculum of the Darul Uloom, written in a modern academic language. Topics which may have relevance to contemporary British society (such as comparative religion, pluralist society and feminist theory, etc.) are not taught, or wider subjects which might be expected to include discussions on these topics are taught in such a way as to prevent students from asking questions about reinterpretation of controversial texts or about citizenship in a pluralist society etc. Lecturers who hold what are deemed 'dangerous modernist ideas' are easily replaced.

Thus, the majority of these Islamic colleges simply provide a glorified seminary curriculum and often fail to suitably train imams to hold positions of religious leadership in a modern pluralist society. This is demonstrated by Parliamentary questions in 2006 about the curriculum of the Hawza Ilmiyya in London, which trains imams, and its sister institution, the Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS), which shares the same staff and offers a degree validated by Middlesex University.

Serious attention also needs to be directed towards British universities which validate these studies, and whether there is sufficient rigour in the control and quality assessment of the validated degrees. Such concerns were raised in the 2007 inquiry under Ataullah Siddiqui, the director of Markfield Institute for Higher Education, entitled *Islam at Universities in England*. The report demonstrates how much needs to be achieved before Islamic studies could be given a clean bill of health.

3.3 The third and smallest category – Islamic colleges offering postgraduate studies – currently provide the most suitable training for imams in multi-cultural and multi-faith Britain. They have avoided many of the problems described above because they:

- were established by prominent Muslim academics who had studied and taught in secular universities
- operate like other mainstream independent higher academic institutions
- teach subjects such as interreligious dialogue, gender studies, Islam and pluralism, etc., both as core and as optional modules

They tend to attract students and staff from a wide range of backgrounds and their students study alongside students with degrees (such as sociology and philosophy) from secular universities, which encourages an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach to Islam and its texts. Three postgraduate colleges stand out:

1. Markfield Institute of Higher Education (Leicester) - <http://www.mihe.org.uk/>
2. The Al-Maktoum Institute (Dundee) - <http://www.almi.abdn.ac.uk/>
3. The Muslim College (London) - <http://www.muslimcollege.ac.uk/>

Courses on understanding other religions are not offered in any of the traditional Islamic seminaries in the UK. Although individual scholars⁸ in some seminaries may occasionally participate in interfaith activities, there is strong opposition to the idea of providing courses on Judaism or Christianity. In cases where Christianity has been discussed, the polemical nineteenth-century text *Izharul Haq* (Truth Revealed) written in refutation of Christianity is used.

Sometimes discussion about Judaism and Christianity takes place in classes on *Tafsir* (Qur'anic Exegesis) and *al-Firaq wa al-Adyan* (Sects and Other Religions), usually to condemn and criticise. Since the curriculum is traditional, discussions about other religions are generally negative and prejudiced.

According to Sheikh Hakimelahi, the Director of the seminary programme at Hawza Ilmiyya in London (a Shi'a seminary):

*We do not teach about other religions because there just is not time to do so in our packed programme.*⁹

The Hawza Ilmiyya came under media attack last year after having been accused of using textbooks that consider Jews and Christians as filth and enemies. The case was even raised in Parliament.¹⁰ Sheikh Hakimelahi explained:

*We no longer have textbooks in our curriculum which teach that the Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book) are najis (filth). Whenever the topic comes up in our fiqh (jurisprudence) classes we do explain to our students the current opinion of Shi'a jurists. According to our current Shi'a jurists and religious authorities, the Ahl al-Kitab are not considered najis (filth) and the previous legal opinion is considered invalid.*¹¹

4. The status of Islamic seminaries in Muslim Communities

For Muslim students the study of classical texts is essential in their training as future Islamic scholars. Unfortunately, most universities are not equipped or prepared to offer training at undergraduate level since not all students taking Islamic studies degrees want to be Islamic scholars. Thus, some students see Islamic seminaries, with their emphasis on classical training, as a necessary route to the academic study of Islam. The dilemma is that graduates from the Islamic seminary will be recognised and respected by the Muslim communities as qualified clerics but will not be accepted by academics. On the other hand, a student who graduates with a degree in Islamic studies from a secular university will not be taken seriously or respected by the Muslim communities as a traditional scholar on Islam. Some students seek recognition from both and spend many years training in the seminaries before studying at university. The fact that seminary programmes are not recognised or validated academically is a major problem, and seminary graduates are not trained in research skills and critical analysis.

5. Examples of traditional Islamic Seminaries in the UK

The Darul Uloom al-Arabiyya al-Islamia at Holcombe, Bury, England is the largest and oldest Islamic seminary in Europe. Most of the UK's trained Islamic scholars are graduates from the Darul Uloom in Bury. It also attracts students from South Asia, America, Canada, the Middle East and Africa. It was founded with financial support from Saudi Arabia. <http://www.inter-islam.org/Pastevents/darululoom.html>

The Hawza Ilmiyya in London was established in December 1997 by some government and ultra-conservative religious agencies in Iran and it continues to receive regular financial support from the Iranian government. It is the largest Shi'a seminary in Europe. It was recently accused by *The Times* of teaching students to despise non-Muslims as filth and enemies. <http://www.hawza.org.uk/>

Other UK Islamic seminaries based on the Darul Uloom (*Dars Nizami*) curriculum:

- Jamia al-Karam Darul Uloom, <http://www.alkaram.org>
- Darul Uloom Birmingham, <http://www.darululoom.org.uk>
- Darul Uloom London, <http://www.darululoomlondon.co.uk>
- Jameah Islameah in East Sussex, <http://www.islamicjameah.org.uk>
- Jamea al-Kauthar for Girls, <http://www.jamea.co.uk>
- Jame'ah Uloomul Qur'an in Leicester, <http://www.jameah.co.uk>

Appendix A

Definition of Terms and Educational Systems

Terms such as Darul Uloom, seminary, *madrassa*, Imam, *ulama*, etc., appear in this report. A study of this nature focusing on seminary training in the three different religious traditions presents a problem of language and definition – understanding terms and concepts in diverse educational traditions. This is key to understanding the nature of education in the UK’s seminaries. For example, can the term ‘seminary’, which has historically referred to Christian educational centres for the clergy, be applied to Jewish and Islamic places of learning? Is a *madrassa* system in the UK an Islamic equivalent of the Christian seminary system or Jewish yeshiva?

Within the Jewish Tradition

- **Yeshiva** (Hebrew): A *yeshiva* is a traditional Jewish educational system or institution for the study of the Torah and the Talmud, primarily for boys or men (although some *yeshivot* (pl. of *yeshiva*) provide religious education to girls and women, sometimes known as Midrasha). There is no age limit and graduates do not automatically qualify as rabbis and will not necessarily go on to work in religious professions. In fact, most young graduates go on to pursue secular studies and professions. In order to qualify as a rabbi, a student must join the *Kollel* or Rabbinical

College upon leaving the Yeshiva.

- **Kollel** (Hebrew): An advanced educational programme where adult students training to qualify as rabbis study a range of Jewish texts, such as the Talmud and other classical rabbinic writings in their original language (primarily Hebrew).

Within the Christian Tradition

- The term **Christian seminary** in this report has been used to refer to theological colleges training and preparing students for Christian ministry in mainstream Protestant denominations and Roman Catholicism.

Within the Muslim Tradition

- **Madrassa** (Arabic): The term *madrassa*, which literally means ‘a place of learning’, is Arabic for ‘school’. It is used in Arabic-speaking countries to refer to any type of school, whether religious or secular, Islamic, Christian or Jewish. It is used by Muslims living in non-Muslim countries (including the UK) to refer to informal evening and weekend Islamic classes where young boys and girls (between the ages of 5 and 16) are taught basic Islamic teachings and how to read and (in most cases)

memorise the Qur'an. Pupils in most UK Muslim communities attend 2–3 hours daily *madrasa* classes in the evenings from Monday to Friday after returning from secular schools and during the weekends. Just as students from the yeshiva system do not automatically qualify as rabbis, the students who complete this type of *madrasa* system do not qualify as Islamic scholars or clerics and will not necessarily go on to work in religious professions. Most young British Muslims who attend the daily *madrasa* system will pursue secular studies and professions upon graduating. In order to qualify as an Islamic scholar or cleric in the UK, a student is expected to join the Darul Uloom or Hawza Ilmiyya system of education upon leaving the *madrasa*.

- A **Darul Uloom** or **Dar al-Ulum** is the Sunni Muslim equivalent of a Jewish *Kollel*. The term Darul Uloom is Arabic for 'House of Knowledge' and refers to a residential formal traditional educational system where adult students (whether male or female) spend between 6–7 years receiving advanced training in studying classical and medieval Islamic texts in their original Arabic language in order to qualify as Muslim clerics. Darul Ulooms are often referred to as Islamic seminaries and in most Muslim and some non-Muslim countries (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, South Africa) the certificate from a reputable Darul Uloom is recognised as an undergraduate degree. The

Darul Uloom system of education is the same for men and women, although women are taught separately in special Darul Ulooms 'for women'. Although Muslims will sometimes use the term *madrasa* to refer to a Darul Uloom, they only do so in the literal sense, in the same way that the term yeshiva is sometimes used to refer to the *Kollel*. Muslims draw a clear distinction between a Darul Uloom and a *madrasa*.

- The term **Hawza Ilmiyya** (Persian/Arabic for 'seminary') is used within Shi'a communities to refer to a traditional Shi'a centre where clerics are trained. Here too students are trained through a study of classic texts in their original languages. In other words, the Hawza Ilmiyya is the Shi'a equivalent of the Darul Uloom system and the core areas of study in the two systems are generally the same.
- **'Alim:** The Arabic term '*Alim*' (plural '*ulama*') literally means scholar and is often used to refer to an Islamic scholar who graduates from a formal traditional Islamic system such as the Islamic university, Darul Uloom or Hawza Ilmiyya systems. A female Islamic scholar who graduates from the formal traditional Islamic system is referred to as '*Alima*' (the feminine form of '*Alim*').
- **Shaykh (male) or Shaykhah (female)**, which literally means 'elder' in Arabic, is the honorific title used to address an '*Alim*' or '*Alima*' (traditional Islamic Scholar). The title Shaykh is conferred upon a scholar during a formal

ceremony where the graduate is presented with an official certificate or *ijaza* (license) (and sometimes a turban) by senior Islamic scholars. The literal meaning of the term Shaykh, 'elder', is sometimes used among members of the Sufi spiritual orders to address a Sufi spiritual guide or leader who may or may not be an *Alim* (Islamic scholar).

- ***Imam***: The term imam is used to refer to any leader of the five

daily prayers in the mosque. An imam is not necessarily a qualified Islamic scholar or theologian because daily prayers can be led by any Muslim. However, in some Muslim countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Egypt) official imams are government employees who must be qualified Islamic scholars and theologians. The influence of UK imams in Muslim communities is more limited than is often realised.

Appendix B

PROPOSED CURRICULUM ABOUT THE 'OTHER'

What Muslim and Jewish seminary students should learn about Christians

An introduction to

1. Christianity today
2. The Christian Bible
3. Jesus of Nazareth
4. What do Christians believe?
5. The development of Christianity
6. Christian perceptions of the 'other'
7. Practices, laws, and rituals
8. The historical encounters between Christians, Jews, and Muslims.
9. Contemporary Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations
10. Christian responses to modernity and its challenges

What Jewish and Christian seminary students should learn about Islam and Muslims

An introduction to

1. Islam and the main branches of Islam
2. What do Muslims believe?
3. The Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Hadith
4. What is Shari'a? Including the main schools of Islamic law
5. Scholarship and debate on the interpretation of the Qur'an
6. Practices, laws, and rituals
7. Islam and Muslim perceptions of the 'other'
8. The historical contacts and encounters between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.
9. Contemporary Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations
10. Islam and Muslims' responses to modernity and its challenges

**What Christian and Muslim seminary students should learn
about Jews**

An introduction to

1. Judaism and Jewish identity
2. The main branches of Judaism
3. What do Jews believe?
4. God in Judaism
5. Practices, laws, and rituals
6. Israel and Jewish perceptions of the 'other'
7. The historical contacts and encounters between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.
8. Contemporary Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations
9. Antisemitism and the Holocaust
10. Jewish response to modernity and its challenges

Appendix C

From **The Times**
April 20, 2006

Muslim students 'being taught to despise unbelievers as filth'

Pupils protest as college linked to Iran puts fundamentalist text on curriculum, reports our correspondent

By Sean O'Neill

MUSLIM students training to be imams at a British college with strong Iranian links have complained that they are being taught fundamentalist doctrines which describe non-Muslims as “filth”.

The Times has obtained extracts from medieval texts taught to the students in which unbelievers are likened to pigs and dogs. The texts are taught at the Hawza Ilmiyya of London, a religious school, which has a sister institution, the Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS), which offers a degree validated by Middlesex University.

The students, who have asked to remain anonymous, study their religious courses alongside the university-backed BA in Islamic studies. They spend two days a week as religious students and three days on their university course.

The Hawza Ilmiyya and the ICAS are in the same building at Willesden High Road, northwest London — a former Church of England primary school — and share many of the same teaching staff.

They have a single fundraising arm, the Irshad Trust, one of the managing trustees of which is Abdolhossein Moezi, an Iranian cleric and a personal representative of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Iranian supreme religious leader.

Mr Moezi is also the director of the Islamic Centre of England in Maida Vale, a large mosque and community centre that is a

registered charity. Its memorandum of association, lodged with the Charity Commission, says that: “At all times at least one of the trustees shall be a representative of the Supreme Spiritual Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Both the Irshad Trust and the Islamic Centre of England Ltd (ICEL) were established in 1996. Mr Moezi’s predecessor as Ayatollah Khamenei’s representative, another cleric called Mohsen Araki, was a founding trustee of both charities.

In their first annual accounts, lodged with the Charity Commission in 1997, the charities revealed substantial donations. The Irshad Trust received gifts of £1,367,439 and the ICEL accepted an “exceptional item” of £1.2 million.

Around the same time, the ICEL bought a former cinema in Maida Vale without a mortgage. Since then it has received between £1 million and £1.7 million in donations each year which, it says, come from British and overseas donors. The centre declined to say if any of its money came from Iran.

Since 2000, its accountants have recorded in their auditors’ report on the charity’s accounts that they have limited evidence about the source of donations.

The links between the two charities and Iran are strong. The final three years of the eight-year Hawza Ilmiyya course are spent studying

in colleges in the holy city of Qom, the power base of Iran's religious leaders.

The text that has upset some students is the core work in their Introduction to Islamic Law class and was written by Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, a 13th century scholar. The Hawza Ilmiyya website states that "the module aims to familiarise the student with the basic rules of Islamic law as structured by al-Hilli".

Besides likening unbelievers to filth, the al-Hilli text includes a chapter on jihad, setting down the conditions under which Muslims are supposed to fight Jews and Christians.

The text is one of a number of books that some students say they find "disturbing" and "very worrying". Their spokesman told *The Times*: "They are being exposed to very literalist interpretations of the Koran. These are interpretations that would not be recognised by

80 or 90 per cent of Muslims, but they are being taught in this school.

"A lot of people in the Muslim community are very concerned about this. We need to urgently re-examine the kind of material that is being taught here and in other colleges in Britain."

Mohammed Saeed Bahmanpour, who teaches in both the Hawza and the ICAS, confirmed that al-Hilli text was used, but denied that it was taught as doctrine. He said that, although the book was a key work in the jurisprudence class, its prescriptions were not taught as law. When he taught from it, he omitted the impurity chapter, he said.

Dr Bahmanpour said: "We just read the text and translate for them, but as I said I do not deal with the book on purity. We have left that to the discretion of the teacher whether he wants to teach it or not.

"The idea is not to teach them jurisprudence because most of the fatwas of Muhaqqiq are not actually conforming with the fatwa of our modern jurists. The idea is that they would be able to read classical texts and that is all."

From The Times April 22, 2006

Dr Bahmanpour said that Mr Moezi had no educational role at either the ICAS or Hawza Ilmiyya. Mr Moezi has been the representative in Britain of Ayatollah Khamenei since 2004 when he also succeeded Mr Araki in the role and as a trustee of the ICEL and the Irshad Trust.

The Islamic centre's website reports Ayatollah Khamenei's speeches and activities prominently and one of the first sites listed under its links section is the supreme leader's homepage.

A spokeswoman for the ICEL also confirmed its links with the Iran's spiritual leadership but said the centre was a purely religious organisation.

Middlesex University, which accredits the ICAS course but not the Hawza Ilmiyya, said: "The BA in Islamic studies offered by the Islamic College of Advanced Studies is validated by Middlesex University.

"This means that Middlesex ensures that the academic standards of this particular programme are appropriate, the curriculum delivers to the required standards, learning and teaching methods allow achievement of standards."

THE DOCTRINE (From the al-Hilli text)

'The water left over in the container after any type of animal has drunk from it is considered clean and pure apart from the left over of a dog, a pig, and a disbeliever'

'There are ten types of filth and impurities: urine, faeces, semen, carrion, blood of carrion, dogs, pigs, disbelievers'

'When a dog, a pig, or a disbeliever touches or comes in contact with the clothes or body [of a Muslim] while he [the disbeliever] is wet, it becomes obligatory- compulsory upon him [the Muslim] to wash and clean that part which came in contact with the disbeliever'

Kelly quizzed on Islamic schools

An MP has submitted parliamentary questions about an Islamic school after *The Times* reported complaints by students that they were taught fundamentalist doctrines.

David Winnick, a member of the Commons Home Affairs Committee, tabled two questions yesterday about the Hawza Ilmiyya of London, which trains imams. *The Times* reported this week that students had complained that the college taught fundamentalist doctrines that described non-Muslims as filth.

Mr Winnick, MP for Walsall North, asked Ruth Kelly, the Education Secretary, what guidance her department was giving to colleges where imams were taught. He asked

Charles Clarke, the Home Secretary, whether the Home Office would investigate allegations of incitement to racial hatred in connection with the college.

Mr Winnick said: "It's totally unacceptable for any religious institution to have, as part of its curriculum, anything that demeans other religions and other people, no matter how much it may be said it is part of some scripture from centuries ago."

From **The Times** August 5, 2006

We need imams who can speak to young Muslims in their own words

by Mohammad Elmi

MORE than 1.8 million Muslims live in Britain. The guidance of this huge population cannot be left to chance. We live in a multicultural society and it is essential that all cultures and faith communities, including the Muslims, live in harmony.

That is why I believe the Muslim community needs a new generation of religious scholars and imams who are born, raised and educated here. These individuals would be better qualified to understand and address the needs of the Muslim youth in the West.

They will promote Islam as it is, ie, a religion of rationality, tolerance and moderation, rather than the misguided, abhorrent version that is willing to inflict pain and suffering on innocent civilians in the name of religion as manifested in the tragedies of 9/11 and 7/7.

It is not possible to expect someone unfamiliar with the multi-ethnic nature of British society, and moreover lacking proficiency in English, to communicate with young Muslims of diverse backgrounds.

The spiritual guidance of the youth at this critical juncture is of utmost importance. A decade ago we realised such a need and established the Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS) to offer a broad education to Muslim youth.

To this end, we have developed academic programmes, such as BA Islamic Studies and Hawza Ilmiyya, to educate religious scholars and to train imams who are not only well versed in Islamic literature but also familiar with British society and Western culture. Because of their broad education (which includes in-depth study of Western civilisation and secular philosophy as well as Islamic law and history) the scholars we train would be fully capable of engaging in dialogue with both Muslims and non-Muslims.

We are educating scholars who are not only aware of the serious problems that the Muslim community is facing today in Britain (eg, unemployment, deprivation, lack of skills), but are also capable of serving as interlocutors in the ongoing interfaith dialogue and of playing

a significant role in the integration of the Muslim community into British society.

They would be able to engage with the youth to ensure that there is no sense of alienation. Upon graduation, our students can serve in a variety of positions. They can work as teachers, lecturers, community workers, chaplains, prayer leaders and religious counsellors. They can serve in almost any capacity where there is a pressing need — and frankly the pressing needs of the Muslim community in Britain are too many to enumerate here.

There are some who have questioned the necessity of such community-based institutions of higher learning. In response, I would like to state that necessary changes in the Muslim community would take place only if done by Muslims who are steeped in the Islamic tradition.

Imposition of solutions from outside the Muslim community, or from the inside by Muslims who have no grounding whatsoever in tradition, has proved to be a recipe for failure. It is absolutely essential that those who want to respond to the emerging needs and requirements of British Muslims do understand and appreciate the intricacies of Islamic jurisprudence.

As an academic institution ICAS has fostered the spirit of independent, critical and analytical thinking among students. The open environment that we have created here is conducive to the rise of independent thinkers who are also committed to the tradition.

We expect the support and encouragement of the discerning intellectual elite in Britain. We have, in fact, received such help from a variety of scholars, experts and academic organisations.

We have received such help from the College of North West London for our A-level programme and Middlesex University for our BA Islamic Studies programme.

Only through understanding and toleration can we work together to bring about harmony and friendship among all faith communities in this multicultural society.

Dr Mohammad J. Elmi is the Principal of the Islamic College for Advanced Studies, London.

¹ What is now often referred to as the Deobandi School of thought or movement started with the establishment of the Darul Uloom seminary at Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, India in 1866 and spread across the world, particularly among Muslims of South Asian background. It is generally puritan in outlook. The Barelwi movement is named after Ahmed Riza Khan of Barelwi in India (1870–1920). It is based mostly on syncretic beliefs and practices of Islam. The two movements have been involved in a bitter and sometimes violent conflict since they were established. Each has shaped and formed its identities by demonising the other. See Sanyal, Usha (1996) *Devotional Islam and Politics in India: Ahmed Riza Khan Barelwi and his Movement (1870-1920)*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Metcalf, Barbara (1978) 'The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Cambridge University Press, pp. 111–134.

² Interview with Reverend Richard Morgan, lecturer with the Theological Federation at Cambridge; recorded by Michael Mumisa, 1 November 2007.

³ For example, the course offered jointly by Queens Foundation for Ecumenical and Theological Education and St Mary's College in Birmingham.

⁴ *The Times*, 20 April 2006.

⁵ For example, the CRS Report for Congress published under the title 'Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background'. See Blanchard, Christopher (23 January, 2008), 'Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background'. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21654.pdf>, accessed 26.05. 2008.

⁶ Interview with Leonie Lewis, interfaith advisor to the Chief Rabbi in London; telephone recorded by Edward Kessler, 12 May 2008.

⁷ Interview with Reverend Richard Morgan, lecturer with the Theological Federation at Cambridge; recorded by Michael Mumisa, 1 November 2007.

⁸ The following teachers, and a few others, have been involved in interfaith work in their personal capacities: Muhammad Amin Evans, who worked with the Shi'a Islamic Institute in Birmingham; Faizal Aqtab Siddiqui of Hijaz College; Dr Sayed Amir Akrami, who is currently teaching at the Islamic Institute in Birmingham.

⁹ Telephone interview with Sheikh Hakimelahi, Director of the seminary

programme at Hawza Ilmiyya in London (a Shi'a seminary); recorded by Michael Mumisa, November 2007.

¹⁰ 'Kelly Quizzed over Islamic Schools' (*The Times*, 22 April 2006).

¹¹ Telephone interview with Sheikh Hakimelahi; recorded by Michael Mumisa, November 2007.