stranger [the asylum seeker, if you like], the orphan and the widow .

This is a firm basis to extend and enlarge the range of issues on which there is already co-operation. This co-operation already encompasses such examples as: Muslims and Christians co-operating with others on a 'curry run', where vulnerable, urban people are fed; Church and mosque co-operating on a summer project with the youth service to engage local, disaffected young men – young men who formerly had been causing a nuisance to Christians and Muslims at worship; Islamic Relief and Christian Aid producing joint posters which went into mosque and church to raise money to relieve victims of humanitarian disasters and an inter-city cricket competition involving mixed clergy and imam teams.

Discuss these guidelines in your group:

1. What did you find helpful in this document?

2. What additional issues do you feel need addressing which were missing from this document?

3. Is this something you could use in study groups in your local church?

4. Can you think of other areas appropriate for co-operation in your locality?

Suggestion: One or more of your group might want to talk to a Muslim leader in advance about such guidelines – even better to invite a local Muslim to the group to talk about it (if such is possible in your area).

Recommended reading:

Reza Aslan: *No God but God*: Arrow Books.

Z. Sardar: *Desperately Seeking Paradise;* Granta Books.

Khaled Abou El Fadl; *The Great Theft;* Harper.

Ed Hussain; *The Islamist, Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw and why I left*; Penguin books 2007.

Philip Lewis; *Young, British and Muslim;* Continuum.

Irshad Manji: *The Trouble with Islam today,* St. Martin's Griffin.

Living Together: Christians and Muslims

The study paper has been prepared by Philip Lewis and Dilwar Hussein, the speakers at the *Spectrum* 2009 conference. In addition Richard Firth contributed the first study.

To introduce the theme some words from President Barack Obama's speech delivered in Cairo, 4th June 2009:
'All of us have a responsibility to work for the day when the mothers of Israelis and Palestinians can see their children grow up without fear; when the Holy Land of the three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews, Christians and Muslims, and a place for all of the children of Abraham to mingle peacefully together . . .'

There are six sessions and discussion questions following each session. A list of further reading is at the end.

Dilwar Hussain is Head of the Policy Research Unit and Senior Research Fellow at the Islamic Foundation, Leicester. He currently teaches a post-graduate course on Islam in Europe and his primary research interests are citizenship, Muslim communities in Britain and Europe, and British Muslim identity.
Philip Lewis works in the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford

John Butterfield, Editor

A 'Common Ancestor' Abraham, Father of Faiths

Prince Charles caused consternation amongst some church people a few years ago when he said that if and when he became king he wanted to be known as 'Defender of Faiths', showing his awareness of the nature of our society.

Abraham is generally acknowledged to be the founding father of the three great monotheistic world faiths, not that he knew that at the time, of course! But a fact that is relevant in this multi-faith and multi-cultural age in which we live. The Genesis stories reveal him to be a man with clay feet and with a mixture of virtues and vices. But a father figure nonetheless and for several reasons.

Firstly, he embraced uncertainty. We are told that he went out not knowing where he was going! He left the security of a settled community in Haran to begin a nomadic life in and around the land of Canaan.

Here in our own day, centuries later, the old certainties are vanishing and foundations are being shaken. The rate of change is exponential. We do not know where we are going. For us, faith is not about seeking certainty and security, but about embracing risk and uncertainty,

whilst at the same time continuing our journey as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, he embraced changed concepts. This is illustrated by the story of the proposed sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham lived in primitive times when it was often imagined that the gods demanded human sacrifices as a demonstration of the loyalty of their followers. However, the provision of the ram caught in a thicket transformed Abraham's perceptions. Animals could be sacrificed, as indeed they were, but humans were not necessary. At the time this was progress, a deeper insight, in that dark and distant age.

After Jesus and the apostle Paul, we believe, further, that we are called to be 'living sacrifices' and to the realisation that loving God with all our minds will involve embracing new theological insights, perhaps even those which come to us from faiths other than our own.

Thirdly, he embraced future promise. However we interpret the stories of Abraham, he was, for the Hebrews, the origin of what was believed to be the promise of God for them. Through the surprise gift of an heir, the initiation of a covenant relationship, and the provision of land for his descendants, that promise gradually became a reality.

The prophets, especially Isaiah, enlarged upon this by proclaiming a vision of a land with its capital, Jerusalem, as a city of peace and welcome for all the nations, which everyone could visit for worship. Sadly, this vision is still far from being realised.

Britain's Muslim communities, many with roots in majority Muslim societies, are having to learn new skills of living well in a pluralist society marked by a complex Christian and secular past. Britain's Christians, for their part, are having to learn to share public and civic space with another world faith which also makes universal claims.

Our two world religions have had a long and sometimes troubled history. We are not responsible for our past history but we are responsible how we use our history. We commit ourselves not to simply re-play those negative episodes where the 'other' was the enemy and so deepen suspicion, but to quarry our respective histories to retrieve and celebrate those episodes of creative co-existence and generosity.

Equally, we are determined not to allow international relations – over which we have no direct control - to dictate how we relate to each other in our cities as British citizens. British Muslims are no more responsible collectively for such terrorist atrocities as those committed in London on 7 July 2005 [7/7] than British Christians for the excesses of western foreign policy!

If imams and clergy are to develop links with a local mosque/church, they will need the support of their mosque committee or Christian congregation. Guidelines are needed about the appropriate *adab*/etiquette in visiting a mosque or church. For example, where *salat*/worship is taking place, the Christian or Muslim visitor is not expected to participate but rather to watch respectfully.

In our post 7/7 world, we have to learn a language to speak of each other from *mimbar*/pulpit which is respectful and enables responsible relationships. It will be a good discipline to ask the following questions: if a Christian or a Muslim was listening to my *khutba*/sermon would he recognise himself in what I was saying about him and his religious tradition? Do my words encourage my *namazis*/congregation to relate well to their neighbours and colleagues at work or to keep their distance from them? The latter is a betrayal of *dawah* and mission.

Christians need to disentangle ethnicity from religion. Practically, this means not using 'Pakistani' as a short hand for 'Muslim'. Not all 'Pakistanis' are Muslim — many are 'census' Muslims and a minority Christian. Further, we should beware of such pejorative labels as 'fundamentalist'. Muslims might wish to refer to Christians as *Ahl al Kitab*, 'People of the Book' — a more respectful term than *Kafir*, 'non-believer' which can fuel an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. Moreover, not all *gore* ['whites'] are Christian, a majority are also likely to be 'census' Christians! Such a care for our language will help us to get away from confusing 'ethnic' identity – English or 'Pakistani'— with religion. This will also help educate our *namazis*/congregation to distinguish 'cultural abuse' from religious teaching: 'forced marriage' is no more part of Islamic teaching than 'binge drinking' is part of 'Christianity'!

Christians and Muslims share many ethical norms. For Christians, justice in society is frequently judged by its treatment of the vulnerable – where three groups are usually mentioned: the

too far in making an individual the target of crude humour. Granted that there are many other complexities around these issues, such as the medium, or Ross and Brand being employed by the publicly funded BBC, but the point could still be made that our notions of freedom, and conversely of offence, are culturally contingent. They are not absolutes. There genuinely does seem to be a clash of cultures here – a difference that gets lost in translation.

Furthermore, the cultural environment in Britain is one in which humour is often self-deprecating. Being able to laugh at oneself is a very British way of expressing self-confidence, and those unable to do so are seen to be nervous and possibly having something to hide.

In this context, while it is important to have laws that ensure people are not harmed, it is unlikely that a law designed to protect religion itself is necessary or even helpful which explains the abolition in May 2008 of long-standing blasphemy law in the UK.

Our approaches to freedom are an important aspect of the cultural negotiation that Muslims are undertaking and we can see important shifts taking place between generations. Starting the conversation from hard positions on either side – 'freedom to offend', or 'the book must be banned' – has not helped at all. We need a genuine willingness to listen, to bear in mind each other's cultural starting points and ultimately, perhaps even ironically, only a climate of free debate and discussion can help the conversation along.

Discussion questions:

1. Discuss the following statement 'British society has become overwhelmed with regulation and laws as law-makers no longer trust people to behave responsibly'.

2. Discuss the similarities and differences between the Christian understanding of freedom and the Islamic one outlined above.

3. How easy is it to protect from offence by legislation? Do blasphemy laws have a place today?

4. Discuss the difference between respect and political correctness.

Study 6:
Respectful dialogue

A selection from guidelines which a joint working party of Christian clergy and Muslim scholars produced in Bradford in 2008 to improve relations between Muslims and Christians:

There are many examples of Christian and Muslim leaders working in partnership to develop relations of trust and to encourage practical collaboration between their respective faith communities. The challenge now is to make sure that trust and practical co-operation between Muslims and Christian becomes rooted and routine in each locality where we live together.

For us this transmutes into the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God and the promise of a world in which justice, freedom and peace are found in every land within the context of a renewed creation.

Christians, Muslims, Jews, and people of other faiths are surely all called to accept the example of Abraham and embrace uncertainty, accept new insights and cherish the vision of a kingdom yet to be.

Questions for discussion:

1. Are there any certainties left and should we be looking for them? Does honest faith embrace an element of doubt?

2. What new ideas have you embraced recently? What other concepts need rethinking in order for our faith to become truly contemporary? Do any ideas in other faiths appeal to you?

3. 'Other sheep I have which are not of this fold'. 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. Is there a contradiction here? How inclusive or exclusive is our faith?

4. What common factors in the great world religions can help to realise the kingdom of God on earth?

Study 2:
Why are Muslim/ Christian relationships difficult?

Muslims are heirs of an impressive civilization to which they continue to look for guidance in the modern world. Tarif Khalidi (Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University) characterises that history as containing four key moments relevant to how Muslims, past and present – especially in majority Muslim countries – have considered Christianity and the West, often seen as unproblematically 'Christian':

The Age of Triumph
(from Qur'an to Jahiz,
seventh to ninth centuries)

The most prominent Qur'anic slogan in this regard is the verse:

It was He who sent His prophet with right guidance and the religion of truth to make it triumph over all other religions, even if the polytheists are set against this.

This is a verse which regularly appears on earliest Islamic coins and inscriptions. It is a triumphalist statement, an affirmation that, in the evolution of religions, Islam has finally triumphed over its tribal cousins. The Qu'ran proclaims a debating triumph, and early Islamic history is seen as confirmation of this on the field of battle. As the religion with the truth, its

truth, its version of history, is victorious over all other versions. But the general tone, as is well known, is by no means hostile. Many Christians, we are told, are more honest than many believers – although one detects a distinct Qu'ranic preference for monastic over church or ecclesiastical Christianity.

This period of triumphalism finds its culmination in the works of the great Jahiz (d.868). In Jahiz, we now have a vindication of Islam, this time not just as a version of history, but also as culture. In Jahiz, it is Islamic culture which is demonstrably superior to Christian and Jewish culture. This is because for Jahiz, Islam inherited, or perhaps co-opted, not only all previous divine revelations but all earlier cultures as well. Thus, where Christian culture is concerned, Jahiz argues that it was guilty of snuffing out Greek philosophy until Islam succeeded in rescuing and reviving wisdom from the decadence into which it had been plunged.

*The Age of Curiosity
(tenth to fourteenth centuries)*

This is an age characterised by intense examination of Christian texts – primarily the Gospels – in an attempt to show how Christians mis-interpreted these texts to arrive at erroneous doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation. Thus, a thinker like Abu Hatim al-Razi (tenth century) argues that the son-ship of Christ is in reality a metaphor rendered dangerously literal by Christians, and hence that the Gospels give no support whatsoever to contemporaneous Christian theology. On the other hand, Islam is made to fit into the biblical

scheme of history and is, for instance, identified as the fourth and final world kingdom predicted in the Book of Daniel. This is a period of great interest to historians of religious encounters because Muslim texts contain a vast amount of material on debates with Christian theologians and minute examinations of Gospel texts. Attributed to the great al-Ghazali (d.1111) is a treatise which controverts the Christian views of Christ's divinity through close analysis of Gospel texts. The view is advanced by some Muslim theologians that it was St Paul who first derailed the original message of Jesus. For these thinkers, St Paul is the person primarily responsible for Christian waywardness. Stripped of its Pauline content, pristine Christianity is indeed a complementary message, one which naturally bears witness to the truth of Islam. In the view of these Muslim thinkers, Christianity is an errant, not a false, religion.

*The Age of Indifference
(fourteenth to seventeenth centuries)*

A sense may be glimpsed of an age when Islam was, by and large, indifferent to Christianity, secure in its belief that there is no longer much to learn from either attacking it polemically or studying it intensively. The complacent comment of ibn Khaldun about the renaissance in Europe is perhaps typical of this Age: 'and it has reached us that the Arts and Sciences are once again finding a ready market in the academies of Europe. And God knows best about this'. It is as if ibn Khaldun is saying that God can effect miracles even among European Christians.

Study 5:
Freedom in Islam and in British society

Free will is the very essence of the human spirit. According to the narrative of the Qur'an it is free will that differentiated humanity from the angels at the point of creation. And even when the angels suggested that (as a result) man would 'make mischief (on the earth) and shed blood,' God replied, 'I know that which you do not' – thus giving divine licence to this unique aspect of his creation and acknowledging that while freedom may lead to corruption, it is only through the exercise of free choice that the human spirit can reach the heights for which it was intended.

This is why, contrary to popular belief, the Qur'an asserts that there should be 'no compulsion' in faith. The opportunity to believe can only be truly realised and valued when there is also an opportunity to disbelieve. Of course, no freedom is absolute and all those involved in debates on 'freedom' or 'freedom of expression' acknowledge the need for laws and rules to regulate behaviour – otherwise there would be anarchy. To paraphrase and misquote the line from Spiderman, 'with great freedom comes great responsibility'.

But freedom and responsibility tend to clash. While Eastern traditions have tended to focus more on responsibility than on freedom, the European experience has been the struggle to win

precious freedoms from monarchs, aristocrats, the Church and others who wielded power – leaving Europeans with a particular penchant for the notions of individual freedoms and rights. Of course duties are important too and have a reciprocal relationship with rights, but the primary emphasis is on rights.

This appears to be a cultural construct and need not be against the spirit of Islam per se. It may be argued that Muslim notions of authority, hierarchy and respect tend to be too romanticised, while Western conceptions of these values have come to be read with more sceptical undertones, at times going too far in that direction.

The issue is therefore to negotiate one's way around these cultural nuances and differences. The notion of respect, for example, seems very different. Muslims have learned to respect religious symbols and icons more than the people that follow those symbols even though the Prophet Muhammad taught that the life of a single person is more precious than the most sacred site in Islam: 'the Ka'bah, and all its surroundings'. Yet today, an attack on the reputation of the Prophet or his family, or a holy site would cause outrage, but an attack on an ordinary Muslim may go unnoticed. However, in the British climate of free speech, institutions and representatives of religion are often seen to be fair targets for ridicule, possibly because of the cynicism towards authority and power (especially of a religious nature), but ordinary people are not usually subject to the same treatment. A play or novel could be offensive towards a religion, but Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand went

insurance, mortgages, deal in the stock market, and even change the way zakat is administered. Yet raise the issue of gender equality, or why there is no categorical prohibition of domestic violence, and the issue becomes 'complicated'.

On issues of equality, liberty and human rights, politically radical trends rooted in authoritarian ideas that negate democratic change are unlikely to come up with the goods. Likewise, it is difficult to see the solutions coming from most traditionalist movements, with their insistence upon limiting practice within the boundaries of *madhabs* (schools of thought), emphasis on *taqlid* (imitation and following) over *ijtihad* and reliance upon tradition over engaging with the modern. There are sophisticated discourses here, but the balance doesn't seem right. Tradition is important, because people that have no sense of history cannot appreciate the future. But a pre-occupation with what has passed at the cost of neglect of the current, let alone the future, is not healthy. I like the analogy of driving a car – the rear view and wing mirrors tell you what you have left behind, and should be checked before a manoeuvre, but the windscreen, which is far bigger, is the main focus, looking ahead.

Ijtihad is thus essential and use of this intellectual tool needs to be consistently enhanced. Furthermore, our approach to religious texts is crucial. Muslims believe the Qur'an to be eternally relevant. And if a finite text is to have infinite relevance, its meaning has to be constantly unfolded, read and reread, in ways that are meaningful and relevant – which also

necessitates a keen understanding of the context. Thus, what it means to be a Muslim needs to be subtly redefined for every age; it is not necessarily the case that history is the receptacle of authenticity – authenticity is about following the spirit of Islam and this will have different expressions in changing contexts. To paraphrase Bruce Lee's famous quip about his style being 'the art of fighting without fighting', what we need is a reformation without Reformation.

Discussion questions:

1. Are the calls for Islam to have a reformation from outside the religion anything more than secular westerners asking Muslims to enter the "real world"?

2. How does *ijtihad* (creative thinking to deal with new challenges) manifest itself in Christianity?

3. To what extent are Christians selective in our reforms?

4. For us the Bible is eternally relevant so its meaning has to be 'constantly unfolded, read and reread, in ways that are meaningful and relevant' - how do we determine those passages of eternal relevance and those cultural antiques that can be discarded. (Eg women speaking and wearing hats in worship?)

The Age of Bafflement
(eighteenth to twentieth centuries)

Why has the Christian West prospered while the Muslim nations have declined? This is a question which recurs in much Muslim speculation of this age, from Tunis to India, and it was no doubt triggered by spectacular Muslim defeats. In fact, several prominent books by nineteenth and early twentieth century Muslim reformers carry precisely this title, or something very close to it. The Muslim response to this question spreads out across a very wide spectrum of answers, all the way from 'we have abandoned the true path of Islam and must return to it' to 'the Christian West does after all have quite a lot to teach us today, as we once upon a time taught it'. It is quite clear from the totality of Muslim answers to this question that the lessons to be learnt from the Christian West are predominantly scientific and technical in nature.

Discussion questions:

1. Reflect on similarities and differences within western Christian history and theology and the vision of this paper. Two additional quotations might be helpful for discussion:

2. Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) did not envisage minority Muslim communities formed by voluntary [economic] migration from Muslim lands to non-Muslim countries. 'Muslim theology offers, up to [now], no systematic formulations of being in a minority' (Dr Z. Badawi, *Islam in Britain*, 1981).

3. With the exception of the recent

trauma of colonialism, Sunni Muslims took power and dominance for granted. 'In the arsenal of group attitudes they knew either how to command or to obey. They had, through most of their history, rarely learned *to live with others in equality and fraternity'* (S.Z. Abedin, in H.Mutalib *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State,* Macmillan, 1994).

4. How have Christians responded in the last century to the decline of political influence? What would you imagine a theologically informed response might be?

5. If you want to capture the challenge to the Muslim world today in the 21st century what would you choose for a 5th heading (adding to Professor Khalidi's four such headings)? Would this be the same or different for Christians and Muslims?

Study 3:
Making sense of 9/11 and 7/7: How to support Muslim friends in a cold climate

It is often said that not enough British Muslims have been heard protesting against violent extremism. The reality is rather that until recently the British media were not geared up to pick up such critical and denunciatory comments. To access the emerging British Muslim press

in English or the proliferation of Muslim blogs would be to challenge this view.

However, Ziauddin Sardar, one of a small group of British Muslim public intellectuals, wrote a splendid article in the political weekly, the *New Statesman*, entitled *The Struggle for Islam's Soul* in which he insisted that 'terrorists are a product of a specific mindset that has deep roots in Islamic history' and that although a minority voice they could not be wished away, ignored but would have to be addressed (18-07-05) — this is also the burden of Ed Hussain's widely read *The Islamist, Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw and why I left*, (Penguin books 2007.)

It is now clear that there was an often hidden process of radicalisation of sections of British Muslim youth in the 1990s – triggered by the first Iraq war, then Bosnia which saw European Muslims being ethnically cleansed and murdered in the heart of Europe, as well as the ongoing tragedy of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Of course, such radicalism does not automatically translate into 'violent extremism' which is generally marked by three components: a Manichaean world view [Muslims versus the rest]; Islam understood as a political ideology and a commitment to violence to achieve aims.

The second war against Iraq & Afghanistan has radicalised a 'third wave' of violent extremists which rests on four components: a sense of *moral outrage* at crimes against Muslims globally and locally; such grievances *interpreted in a specific way* as part of a larger war against Islam; such an

ideology can resonate *with their own personal experience* of discrimination, real or imagined; a few individuals are then *mobilised through networks*, whether face to face or online (adapted from Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 2008, University of Pennsylvania).

President Obama's Cairo speech clearly seeks to address many of these grievances, real and imaginary. (It can be found in full on "The Guardian" website). Christians in Britain – not least the church leadership – had an honourable role in opposing the second Iraq war. It was heartening to see so many British citizens come out in mass rallies opposing the war. However, we also need to admit that the previous President's rhetoric about evil empires, a war against terror and initially the use of 'crusade' was ill considered in the extreme – not to speak of the actual invasion of Iraq!

Discussion Questions:

1. Are there things Christians might say and do locally that would support British Muslims in their attempts to de-legitimise such extremist rhetoric?

2. To what extent do you judge President Obama's Cairo speech as a hopeful new beginning in relations between the Muslim world and the West?

3. Are you aware of popular Christian commentary which colludes in the demonization of Islam and Muslims? How might Christians engage such perspectives?

Study 4:

Reformation in the Islamic world?

"Remember, remember the fifth of November, the gunpowder, treason and plot . . ." At that time of year the night sky is set alight by fireworks. We forget the story of bonfire night and Guy Fawkes, is a reminder of deep schisms and controversies of European history, connected to the Reformation.

Many have called for a Reformation within Islam. But what does this mean? The European Reformation had a particular history, so is this a Eurocentric imposition? What do we expect out of a Reformation? Is it a meeker, milder and cuddlier brand of Islam – and will we get that through a Reformation? In Europe it led to a tremendous amount of bloodshed and upheaval – the 30 years war for example – and a long-standing tension between Catholics and Protestants. Some of the more literalist and fundamentalist Christian views stem from the reformed end of the spectrum – the parallel among Muslims would be Wahhabism.

Having said this, even if there are some political motives behind the calls for reform, muddled in there somewhere are also genuine concerns – coming to terms with changes in the modern world just cannot be ignored. So how can we keep the baby while we throw out the bathwater? And ensure that change occurs on our own terms, and not by imposition from outside?

Reform is possible without 'a Reformation'. Reform (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*) are essential underpinnings of Islamic thought that are meant to be constant forces of change (*taghyir*). Islam also has intellectual tools such as *ijtihad* (creative thinking to deal with new challenges). It is a well-known legal maxim in the Shariah that a fatwa can change with time and place. This is starkly demonstrated by the story of Imam Shafi'i travelling from Iraq to Egypt and re-writing much of his teachings in the light of the new situation. Yet because that spirit of ijtihad has been suppressed in the name of 'tradition', many scholars will use books that are centuries old to pluck out fatwas for today. Something has really gone wrong! In a post-Caliphate world that has experienced globalisation, urbanisation and international conventions and treaties, fatwas from even a decade ago can seem widely off the mark.

There is also selective application of ijtihad. A paper presented to a council of scholars some years ago on calculation of prayer times contained detailed scientific data on light levels, the different degrees of latitude and longitude and the effects these would have on the visibility of the sun. Alas, when the discussion turned to the banning of religious symbols in France, which was topical at the time, there were no papers on French history, secularism or identity. Instead the vacuum was mainly filled by polemical discussion. Similarly, if we look at the realm of Economics, the amount of ijtihadi energy that has been poured into the subject, from even conservative scholars, is remarkable. This has allowed Muslims in the modern day to take out