

Sharia Law in Britain

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

[According to BBC News](#), "The Archbishop of Canterbury says the adoption of certain aspects of Sharia law in the UK 'seems unavoidable'. Dr Rowan Williams told Radio 4's World at One that the UK has to 'face up to the fact' that some of its citizens do not relate to the British legal system. Dr Williams argues that adopting parts of Islamic Sharia law would help maintain social cohesion."

What a catastrophic betrayal of the very Western values that have made Britain a free, open and egalitarian society! But let me not assume he is an idiot. Let me assume he just phrased things in a clumsy way and see if I can read some sense into what he said. He kept on repeating that Jews in Britain have a Beth Din that deals with family and other matters. He is right that we Jews may voluntarily take issues to a Beth Din and it is true that Jewish Law asks of us that we do this rather than go to civil courts. But the Beth Din only functions voluntarily and does not override or supersede the law of the land.

For example, a Beth Din will not finally issue a divorce until after the civil courts have finalized the matter. As for arbitration or settling financial matters, this can only be done by agreement. As we saw two years ago, a Dayan of the Federation ended up in the civil courts in a dispute with a Jewish businessman. Halachic courts operate purely on a voluntary basis. Now if the Archbishop was saying that Muslim courts could function in the same voluntary way, no one would argue with him. Of course, every religion has the right to worship, dress and conduct its internal affairs as it wishes so long as it does not offend the law of the land.

But he didn't say that. He said Civil Law has to accommodate to Sharia. In this charged, tense atmosphere his language was ill considered and childish at best. Such a suggestion is not only madness, but also a complete betrayal of British values. No wonder so many Christians in the UK prefer the Chief Rabbi to the Archbishop.

There is no way you can unite a country and a varied population without a single system of law. It is already a scandal that the police and the judiciary turn blind eyes to honor murders and forced marriages in flagrant opposition to English Law, for fear of offending sections of the population. It is a scandal that Social Welfare pays out large sums to multiple wives in a society where polygamy is against the law.

The problem is that many Muslims are as open, law-abiding, and religiously moderate as most Jews. Sadly, there is a significant number that come from more primitive sectors of Islam and have not yet made any concessions to modernity, other than Coca-Cola. They need to be encouraged to do so, not be pandered to, because in pandering we are abetting the betrayal of moderate Islam.

If Christianity is so weak that it has given up the fight for its values, please, I beg the government to stand firm. It was elected to serve British values, but if it concedes it will preside over the destruction of British values within a generation.

The Jews who came to Britain always knew they had to abide by the law of the land. We have always done this. Now it seems the Archbishop wants to see one law for Christians and Jews and another for Muslims. We might as well invite the Saudi Royal Family to move into Buck House.