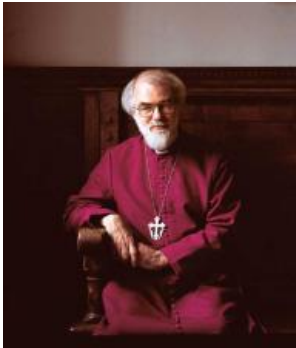


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Sharia Law in Great Britain?

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The Archbishop of Canterbury has instant access to the media and his office carries a great deal of symbolic weight in Great Britain, where he is the senior cleric in the established church. That said, the current archbishop, Rowan Williams, seems to attract an unprecedented amount of controversy.

As a matter of fact, the Archbishop's current controversy now threatens his leadership, with senior figures calling for his resignation and even his predecessor lambasting his arguments. Some in the media are even questioning his state of mind, asking what many others must be thinking.

What got the Archbishop in such trouble? He called the establishment of some kind of Islamic Sharia law in Britain inevitable.

For the past two or three decades, Britain has been engaged in a radical experiment in abandoning its own national identity. It has encouraged a huge number of Islamic immigrants to enter the country. This explains why some of the most extreme sects of Islam have taken root on British soil. Just a few weeks ago, another senior cleric warned that some areas of Britain's cities has become "no go" zones for non-Muslims. Any casual visitor to some British cities will know exactly what he means.

Of course, with a large Muslim population comes pressure for Muslims to be able to live under Sharia law, especially when governing matters of marriage, family law, and related issues. The amazing thing is that Archbishop Williams seems to think this is inevitable.

In [an address](#) he delivered February 7, Williams tried to offer a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the law and religious minorities in a secular society. His analysis was, if anything, so sophisticated that no one seems able to make sense of it. What was clear was that the Archbishop sees the arrival of Sharia law as something that cannot and should not be prevented. Part of the problem seems to be that the Archbishop entertained the notion that Sharia law could be limited in a way that would protect Western norms — a notion that appears ludicrous to most of his fellow citizens. The reaction was explosive. Influential columnist Ruth Gledhill of The Times asked the obvious question: "[Has the Archbishop gone bonkers?](#)" This is how she saw the issue:

And now Queen Elizabeth II's very own Archbishop - and let's not forget she is his Church's Supreme Governor - wants to introduce a new 'jurisdiction into this realm of England.' And an Islamic one at that!

It is one thing for judges to take Shariainto account, as has happened in Germany. It is quite another to follow the line the Archbishop is suggesting. It led to near disaster in Ontario, Canada two years ago and would created untold and unnecessary distress here were it to be implemented here.

The Archbishop has staked everything on trying to maintain unity in his own Anglican Communion. At the same time, he is advocating a policy that could only fragment the society around him.

In [another column](#), Gledhill would tie the Archbishop's proposal to "intellectual arrogance." Whatever the cause, the Archbishop's proposal has caused a conflagration in Britain. The Queen, who constitutionally serves as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, is said to believe that Archbishop Williams is undermining the credibility of his office and of his church.

Europe is fast abandoning its Christian heritage, but when the Archbishop of Canterbury sets himself as an advocate for Sharia law in Britain, some key watershed has been crossed. Ruth Gledhill's question is the right one.

