

THE TIMES

Faith

Extremists misunderstand Islamic Caliphate, says Faith Matters

Ruth Gledhill, Religion Correspondent

09 Oct 2011 15:09:11

Extremist Muslims who campaign for the return of an Islamic Caliphate are deluded in their understanding, and in fact the true Caliphate was a model of secular reform, according to a report.

Faith Matters, the respected interfaith think-tank, debunks extremist claims about the caliphate in an investigation of the secular reforms of the Ottoman Empire.

Far from presiding over strict Sharia, the caliphate in the 19th century in particular was a forerunner to secular Western democracies in many of its reforms. It decriminalised homosexuality, moved away from punishments such as stoning and did not implement the death sentence for apostasy.

Al-Qaeda is among the groups that would like to see the re-establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. The late Osama Bin Laden called for Muslims to re-establish the caliphate. He said: "The righteous Caliphate will return with the permission of Allah."

Hizb ut-Tahrir also campaigns for a caliphate, which is a system of government with ruler, or successor to the Prophet Muhammad, who governs by Sharia.

Fiyaz Mughal, founder and director of Faith Matters, says in the report: "Faith Matters is launching this paper to offer a brief insight into the secular reforms of the Ottoman Empire, in order to analyse and debunk claims by extreme groups such as al-Qaeda, who portray it historically as an Islamic Caliphate, strictly governed by Sharia. The Ottoman Empire is often presented by such groups as a model political system upon which to rebuild a global caliphate."

Ishtiaq Hussain, the report's author, shows that rather than inserting narrow religious laws into the state's legal framework, the Ottomans attempted to secularise.

Mr Mughal says: "Islamists often bypass these facts and use a warped interpretation of history to weave their own narrative into mainstream debate."

He describes the report as “the first of its kind to expose and dismantle the Islamist historical account of the Ottoman Empire”.

Mr Hussain says in the report that secular reforms in the Ottoman Empire can be traced back to the 17th century and that in the mid-19th century, customary and religious laws were either abolished or repealed in favour of secular European laws.

“This was done on the orders of the Sultan/Caliph himself and with the approval of the religious authorities. Also during this period, the Ottomans attempted to integrate non-Muslim communities and afford those communities equal rights and privileges,” he says.

He concludes: “The Ottoman Empire was far from being the ideological Caliphate that Islamist groups purport it to be. Rather, it was a pragmatic military empire doing whatever it needed in order to survive.”

The report comes as latest reports from Iran show that fabricated charges of rape and extortion have been levelled against Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian pastor, after an international campaign against his death sentence for apostasy.

The Barnabas Fund, a UK-based charity that supports persecuted Christians abroad, reports that Gholomali Rezvani, deputy governor of Gilan province where Mr Nadarkhani was tried, told the semi-official Fars news agency that Mr Nadarkhani was a rapist, an extortionist, a Zionist and was guilty of “security-related crimes”, adding: “No one is executed in Iran for their choice of religion.”

Mr Nadarkhani has been sentenced to death for apostasy even though he has never been a Muslim. He has refused to recant his faith and a final verdict from the court is expected in the next few days.

Related Images



Fiyaz Mughal: debunking the ideas surrounding the Islamic Caliphate

Paul Rogers for The Times



He is pictured next to Islamic calligraphy based on the Ottoman Empire

Paul Rogers for The Times

Publisher: News International Ltd

Published Date: 09 Oct 2011 15:09:11

Article Id: 1256130 Version: 1

Word Count: 558

Character Count: 2854



Reproduced by the NLA with permission from News International Ltd. This work is copyright of the thetimes.co.uk.