Editorial: Islam in Britain
Tom Wilson

The relationship between Islam and Christianity in the UK is a complex one, and three articles in a journal can barely scratch the surface of that complexity. It is undoubtedly true that violent Islamist inspired extremism is on the rise throughout the world. And it is equally true that the overwhelming majority of Muslims who live in the UK have no terrorist or violent intentions towards their fellow British citizens. But so much more can, and should, be said. The Church must face up to the reality of British Muslims engaging in acts of horrific violence both in the United Kingdom and throughout the world. Questions of domestic violence, of gender selective abortion, of ghettoization and deliberate isolation from the wider community, as well as experience of Islamophobia, heavy-handed policing, disproportionately high unemployment and educational drop-out rates are all pressing issues within Britain's diverse Muslim communities. These are all questions that the Church can, and should be helping answer. We are called to love our enemies, to follow the pattern of the Good Samaritan who deliberately chose to respond to the need of a wounded fellow human being, paying no attention to his religious beliefs. Carl Medearis and Steve Bell are two well-known Christians who speak clearly of the importance of displaying grace to our Muslim brothers and sisters as we share the love of Jesus Christ with them, and Interserve's *Friendship First* course is an excellent resource for those wishing to take first steps in engaging positively with their Muslim neighbours. This will not be an easy or straightforward process, but it is an urgent, pressing concern for today.

Presence and Engagement is the Church of England's national programme equipping Christians for mission and ministry in our multi faith society. The programme has developed a new language for this work, focusing on the importance of the Church both remaining present in multi religious areas and engaging positively with communities of other faiths. Presence and Engagement is different from inter faith dialogue, although complementary to it, and focusses on the task of supporting and resourcing the Church.

Presence and Engagement began as a national listening exercise leading to a report which was discussed at General Synod in 2006. The report used data from the 2001 Census to map statistics for religious affiliation to local parish boundaries. 'Presence and Engagement Parishes' were those with a substantial population of one or more different faith communities.

Almost ten years on, alongside increasing numbers of Presence and Engagement parishes, there are now Presence and Engagement centres in Bradford, Birmingham and Leicester. There is also a web-based network operating in London and many of the Church of England's dioceses have appointed Interfaith Advisers. For more information, see www.presenceandengagement.org where you will find resources for those who want to

engage in outreach with people of other faiths, as well as a simple form that can be used to find information about the religious composition of each Anglican diocese and parish within England. We had hoped to have an article giving more detail about *Presence and Engagement* in this issue, but sadly that has not been possible.

The three articles on Islam with which this issue begins offer some practical guidance for first steps in this process. Philip Lewis gives a brief overview of the diverse Muslim communities that are present in Britain. There is much more that he, rightly, wanted to include to add some more flesh on the skeleton outline present in his article, but limitations of space prevented this. What the article does especially well is to fairly and faithfully present mainstream Islamic views in a manner that will be accessible to those who are relatively inexperienced in engaging with Muslims. The footnotes provide pointers for where to follow up in greater detail.

Ida Glaser's article is a worked example of how to read the Bible with Muslims in mind. This is of particular relevance for those who are further on in engaging with Muslims and want use Christian scripture as part of that engagement. There is a growing body of literature on the process of 'Scriptural reasoning' (<http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/>) and it is an especially fruitful method of inter-faith dialogue for spiritual leaders.

My own article is rooted in my PhD fieldwork in an Anglican primary school where the majority of the pupils were Muslims. Educational institutions are perhaps one of the places where Christians are most likely to encounter Muslims and be in a position to share faith with them. The article reflects on the practice of a particular school and offers guidance for the type of approach that could be taken.

Moving on from Islam in Britain, in a two-part review, Chris Tilling has written one of the first serious, indepth engagements with N. T. Wright's *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Wright's tome is so massive that a review article of it is correspondingly long, and in order to fit in with the constraints of publishing with deGruyter, it is offered here in two parts. It is followed by a series of other book reviews, including a number of recommended resources for engaging with Islam.