

Islam gains ground in Europe

With their Muslim populations growing, Europeans are reassessing how well they integrate religious minorities.

Muslims in Leicester, England are doing shopping in markets filled with foods that comply with Islamic law. The surrounding streets are decorated with special lights to mark the Muslim holiday of Eid.

In Leicester, a city of 285,000 people in England's heartland, Muslims make up more than 15 percent of population. There are more than 30 mosques nearby, as well as a public library with shelves of books in Arabic, along with newspapers from across Asia and the Middle East. The neighborhood Islamic schools receive state funding, just like Christian and Jewish ones.

When the 2011 census is taken, Leicester is expected to become the first European city with a non-Christian majority.

"Cities from all over Europe are finding that they are becoming a lot more like Leicester," said Mustafa Malik, chief executive of the Pakistan Center in the Highfields neighborhood.

In Britain where there are about 1,600 mosques, the government has sought to engage more with Muslim communities. Earlier this year, the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said an element of Islamic religious law, would inevitably have to be incorporated into British law.

Asaf Hussain, an interfaith leader and scholar at the University of Leicester, stresses that more work should be done to encourage establishment of a meaningful integration among government and religious groups. He states that people from different religious views should establish a real bond with each other, rather than staying only with their own circle of people.

In France, whose 5 million-strong Muslim minority is Western Europe's largest, many Muslims say they feel welcome in France, where the population seems to have grown so accustomed to having large mosques in their midst that many mayors even provide land at cheap rates for them.

There is a big fuss about Islamization, but French society is very accepting," says Deborah Remmane, secretary of the Muslim Students of France association in Paris.

Remmane also says that if segments of the population don't get along, it generally has more to do with financial status than it does with religion.

Most experts estimate there are 15 million to 20 million Muslims living among Western Europe's population of 400 million. Without taking into account the possible admission of Turkey into the European Union, the number of Muslims is expected to grow to more than 40 million by 2050, representing about 15 percent of Europe's population.

Undoubtedly, all of these are very pleasing developments for the century we are living in. It is really good news for believers that number of people who live according to Qur'anic morals grows with a significantly fast pace all around the world. Besides, it is very important for people to live in a mutual tolerance, love and respect. No doubt, taking the path of love and peace is one of the strongest solutions to terrorism. Religious ethics furnish people with feelings of love for people, compassion, tolerance and justice. It is absolutely necessary for a world filled with peace. In the Qur'an, whole humanity is called to living peacefully as such:

Allah calls to the Abode of Peace and He guides whom He wills to a straight path. Those who do good will have the best and more! Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces. They are the Companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. But as for those who have earned bad actions – a bad action will be repaid with one the like of it. Debasement will darken them. They will have no one to protect them from Allah. It is as if their faces were covered by dark patches of the night. Those are the Companions of the Fire, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. (Surah Yunus, 25-27)

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