

Charles III: How the New King Became the Most Pro-Islam Monarch in British History

A thoughtful man, he has studied Islam deeply, even going to the lengths of learning Arabic in order to read the Quran

By [Peter Osborne](#) and [Imran Mulla](#)

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Last week, [Liz Truss](#) took over as prime minister of what many consider to be the most Islamophobic government in British history.

A government which [refuses to engage](#) with [the largest representative body](#) of British Muslims and has framed an invidious security regime ([Prevent](#)) which targets them; in which a minister was [sacked](#) because her “Muslim woman minister status was making colleagues feel uncomfortable”. A government [accused](#) this week of treating Muslims like [second-class citizens](#).

Little surprise: more than half of the members of the ruling Conservative Party entertain [wild conspiracy theories](#) about British Islam.

Two days after Truss became prime minister, **King Charles III** acceded to the British throne. A thoughtful man, he has studied Islam deeply, even going to the lengths of [learning Arabic](#) in order to read the Quran.

The new king is the most Islamophile monarch in British history. The contrast with his government is stark.

An electrifying speech

In a series of statements dating back several decades, King Charles III has [rebutted](#) the “[clash of civilisations](#)” thesis which argues that Islam is at war with the West. On the contrary, he [argues](#) that Islam, Judaism and Christianity are three great monotheistic religions which have far more in common than is generally appreciated.

Since 1993, the new king has been a patron of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. In that year he delivered its inaugural address, entitled “[Islam and the West](#)”. It wasn’t the sort of speech on religion that most people expect from politicians and royals; they tend to utter little more than empty platitudes.

Then Prince of Wales, he launched into a sophisticated musing on Islamic civilisation and its relationship with Europe. The prince said that Islam is “part of our past and our present, in all fields of human endeavour. It has helped to create modern Europe. It is part of our own inheritance, not a thing apart.”

He urged people in the West to see past contemporary distortions of Islam: “The guiding principle and spirit of Islamic law, taken straight from the Quran, should be those of equity and compassion.”

He noted that women were granted the right to property and inheritance in Islam 1,400 years ago, paid tribute to the “remarkable tolerance” of medieval Islam, and lamented western “ignorance about the debt our own culture and civilisation owe to the Islamic world”.

The then-prince described Britain’s Muslim communities as an “asset to Britain” who “add to the cultural richness of our nation”.

Unlike those who demand that Muslims [discard their identities](#) in order to assimilate, Charles called for a process of two-way integration: Muslims must “balance their vital liberty to be themselves with an appreciation of the importance of integration in our society”, while non-Muslims should adopt a “respect for the daily practice of the Islamic faith and a decent care to avoid actions which are likely to cause deep offence.”

It was an electrifying speech: here was the heir to the throne telling Britain’s Muslims, most of them migrants from the former colonies, that their presence in the country was not just welcome but valued.

It’s hard to conceive of a greater contrast with recent interventions by Britain’s most senior politicians.

The ‘controversial’ prince

In more recent years Charles’s attitudes towards Islam and the Muslim world have often caused controversy.

A 2018 [book](#) by royal correspondent Robert Jobson, written with the cooperation of Charles’s office, [revealed](#) that he opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, privately voicing his objections to Prime Minister Tony Blair. According to Jobson, Charles believed that “marching in carrying a banner for western-style democracy was both foolhardy and futile”. Charles has also [told](#) ministers that he no longer wishes to have his connections with Gulf leaders used

for British arms companies to sell weapons.

Then there's his [sympathy](#) towards the Palestinians, which may be why it was his son Prince William, and not Charles himself, who carried out the [first royal visit](#) to Israel in June 2018. It was only in 2020 that Charles made his first visit to Israel. He took care to visit the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where he [declared](#) it his "dearest wish that the future will bring freedom, justice and equality to all Palestinians".

No recent British minister has uttered similar sentiments. When it comes to European Muslims, Charles is a critic of the secularism of France and Belgium, [disagreeing](#) with their bans on women wearing the face veil in public. He has no time for the anti-Muslim politics gaining ground throughout Europe.

Charles has come under fire for his charity work. Last June, the then-prince was in the headlines after the Sunday Times [revealed](#) that he accepted a suitcase containing a million euros in cash from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, the former Qatari prime minister. Charles's charitable fund denied wrongdoing and there's no suggestion at all that he benefited personally.

He may have made errors of judgement, but much of the press reporting has been ignorant and unfair.

Consider the flurry of sensational articles in July about a million-pound donation his charitable fund received from the family of Osama Bin Laden in 2013. There was [no wrongdoing](#): the Bin Laden family is one of the most established in Saudi Arabia, and the implication of a connection with terrorism and Al Qaeda was nonsense.

A devout 'traditionalist'

Anti-Muslim commentators mock Britain's new king for his intellectual curiosity. The American neoconservative commentator Daniel Pipes is one example. His [blog](#) post entitled: "Is Prince Charles a Convert to Islam?" cites numerous pieces of "evidence" that he himself has become Muslim, including that Charles took part in a fast-breaking ceremony in Ramadan and [his criticism](#) of Salman Rushdie for insulting the "deepest convictions" of Muslims.

A century ago, similar false [rumours](#) once swirled around Winston Churchill.

In truth, the king is a devout Anglican whose deep engagement with Islam (as well as Judaism and Orthodox Christianity) is connected to his [interest](#) in Traditionalism, the esoteric 20th-century school of thought whose early proponents railed against the modern world, believing that all the great religions share universal truths that could be antidotes to contemporary woes.

Charles has engaged in particular with the works of Rene Guenon, one of Traditionalism's most important thinkers. Writing in the early 20th century, Guenon - a French intellectual raised as a Catholic and educated at the Sorbonne - [saw](#) Western modernity, which "developed upon material lines", as representing an "anomaly" in human history.

"If [Traditionalists] defend the past," Charles [said](#) in a 2006 speech, "it is because in the pre-modern world, all civilisations were marked by the presence of the sacred." By contrast,

our current era is one of “disintegration, disconnection, and deconstruction”.

In an [address](#) to the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly in 2000, Charles warned that our age is “in danger of ignoring, or forgetting, all knowledge of the sacred and spiritual”. It’s this concern which underpins his environmentalism. Charles [believes](#) that the modern West “has become increasingly acquisitive and exploitative”, suggesting that we can re-learn the “trusteeship of the vital sacramental and spiritual character of the world” from Islam.

Guenon himself [looked to the east](#), writing several books on Hinduism and Taoism before leaving Paris for Cairo. There he became initiated into the Ahmadiyya Shadhiliyya Sufi order and studied at Al Azhar, one of the world’s centres of Sunni Muslim scholarship. He died a Muslim in Cairo in 1951.

Guenon’s role in [shaping](#) the king’s worldview has bewildered many mainstream commentators. Military historian Max Hastings is one case in point. In a [review](#) of Charles’s 2010 book *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World*, he wrote in the Daily Mail that the “chief peril to our royal institution in the decades ahead lies within his well-meaning, muddled, woolly head.”

Brutal criticism

Undeterred by the disapproving gaze of the British media, Charles used his position as Prince of Wales to further his ideas in a practical sense. In 1993, The Prince’s Foundation began to [house](#) the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts Programme.

There, students produced Mughal miniatures, Ottoman tiles and Arabic calligraphy. Two prominent Traditionalist scholars were visiting tutors – philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr and scholar Martin Lings, who wrote a famous biography of the Prophet Muhammad and [felt](#) “struck by lightning” when he first read Guenon. The programme became [The Prince’s Foundation School of Traditional Arts](#) in 2004.

Charles’s love for Islamic art is on display in his personal life. Hence the Carpet Garden, inspired by Islamic gardens, at his Gloucestershire home Highgrove. Charles [explained](#): “I planted fig, pomegranate and olive trees in the garden because of their mention in the Qur’an.”

All this places King Charles dangerously out of step with the Truss government and the Conservative Party she leads. If Charles returns to the subject of Islam, he is certain to open himself up to brutal criticism from the neoconservative right which sets much of the agenda for this Conservative government.

It remains to be seen whether, on the throne, he will continue to speak about religion as openly as he did when he was Prince of Wales. He needs to bear in mind the lesson of his mother, who astutely steered clear of public controversies. It is nevertheless profoundly significant that we have a king who openly admired Islam.

A bold statement

Mosques across the country wished their [condolences](#) on the death of Queen Elizabeth, and many Muslims have been noting the new king’s attitudes towards Islam.

In his [sermon](#) before the prayer last Friday in Cambridge's eco-friendly mosque, Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, the University's Shaykh Zayed Lecturer in Islamic Studies, quoted extensively from Charles's 1993 speech on "Islam and the West", reflecting that Charles's generous interest in Islam set him apart from much of the British political class. Noting that Charles learnt Arabic to read the Qur'an, he [asked](#): "How many people in Parliament would do that?"

Will Charles follow the gentle example of his mother and [quietly](#) emphasise Britain's traditions of tolerance and [multiculturalism](#), in contrast to the nationalism of the Johnson and Truss governments?

There is some evidence that he will.

Consider King Charles III's [first address](#) as sovereign: "In the course of the last seventy years, we have seen our society become one of many cultures and many faiths," he said, before promising that "whatever may be your background or beliefs, I shall endeavour to serve you with loyalty, respect and love".

This was a bold and unequivocal statement of pluralism. And anyone who has paid attention to Charles' pronouncements and actions as Prince of Wales will know that he means it sincerely. It is a position that sets him apart from the British government.

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Peter Osborne won best commentary/blogging in both 2022 and 2017, and was also named freelancer of the year in 2016 at the Drum Online Media Awards for articles he wrote for Middle East Eye. He was also named as British Press Awards Columnist of the Year in 2013. He resigned as chief political columnist of the Daily Telegraph in 2015. His latest book is *The Fate of Abraham: Why the West is Wrong about Islam*, published in May by Simon & Schuster. His previous books include *The Triumph of the Political Class*, *The Rise of Political Lying*, *Why the West is Wrong about Nuclear Iran* and *The Assault on Truth: Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and the Emergence of a New Moral Barbarism*.

Imran Mulla studies History at Cambridge University.

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Articles by: **Peter Osborne**
and **Imran Mulla**

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