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ATTEMPT IN PROGRESS TO BAN THE WORK OF MISSIONARIES TO MUSLIMS IN LONDON

Couple Uses Debate To Reach Muslims On College Campuses Throughout The United Kingdom

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LONDON, ENGLAND (ANS) -- An attempt to ban the work of an Evangelical missionary couple working among Muslims in London, Europe and Africa for nearly 20 years, has been revived by those who are opposed to their methods.

Jay and Judy Smith are missionaries sponsored by the Brethren in Christ World Missions, which appointed Jay and Judy as full-time missionaries to the Muslim world in 1983. They have worked in evangelism among Muslims in England (seconded to Ichthus Christian Fellowship in London), France, and Senegal (seconded to SIM) and are currently working in apologetical and research work among the Muslims of London, England. Jay teaches Muslim/Christian apologetics for those exploring ministry in the Muslim world. He co-teaches various undergraduate and graduate courses on Islam.

The apologetical and historical work, which Jay Smith is researching in his current studies for a Ph.D., is written into a series of tracts and position papers. These are used in discussions at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London, and in debates and seminars on the university campuses around England. (The tracts and papers are on the Internet, where a lively debate is ongoing between Muslim and Christian students from around the world. The domain is: <http://debate.org.uk>.)

The Brethren in Christ International Fellowship U.K., began in 1979 primarily as a ministry to African expatriates in London. The group, now known as the Forest Gate Brethren in Christ Church, is still in existence but faces new challenges as they continue to explore the Lord's leading. In 1992, a new initiative started as one missionary couple, Jay and Judy Smith started ministering to the rapidly growing Muslim population. (In England up to 15 percent of the population is Muslim).

Jay Smith's registration at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies opened doors of witness to intellectuals who will be future leaders of power and influence. Weekly discussions at the historical "Speaker's Corner" of Hyde Park provide an open forum for the confrontation between the Gospel and Islam. The most powerful witness has been written in the form of answers to the 99 questions most often asked of Christians by Muslims. The goal is the conversion of Muslims and their integration into evangelical Christian churches.

In a letter dated April 21, Jay Smith writes: "Some of you may know that there was an attempt by a 'moderate' Muslim chaplain (Oxford and London universities) named Muhammad Yusuf, to have myself and Dr. Saunders of CMF banned from University College of London (UCL) last year. Fortunately, due to some wise decisions by the administration of that institution, the ban failed.

"Now, this year Muhammad Yusuf, along with The Catholic Student Council, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, the National Union of Students, the Student Christian Movement and the Union of Jewish Students have put together a 10-page paper, entitled 'Faiths Together on Campus,' outlining the need to have those of us, primarily from the Evangelical camp, banned from proselytizing on any UK based campuses. Interestingly, in the paper the five Christian groups, which Muslims are warned about, are all groups I either have started, work with, or work for (Ishmael my Brother, Hyde Park Christian Fellowship, All Souls, UCCF, and CMF).

FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES

"If successful, much the work we do on the campuses will be curtailed, the debates cancelled, and pluralism will have won yet another victory towards censorship of any exclusive claim for salvation. This will have far reaching consequences for other areas of public life as well, as a precedence will have been set for a similar ban to be easily picked up and used by all public institutions.

"Fortunately there are a few voices who want to see this form of censorship stopped, and are saying so publicly," Smith wrote.

The article below comes from a recent edition of the 'Church of England Newspaper,' written by the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Andrew Carey.

Headlined: "NEW THREAT THAT COULD CLOSE CHRISTIAN UNIONS" the article states, "Christian Unions are under threat at British universities as a result of a wrongheaded initiative which lumps evangelicals together with Islamic organizations like the Al-Muhijiroun, which condone anti-Semitism and terrorism.

"Ironically enough the liberal Student Christian Movement, which has looked with envy on the success of the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship for 50 years in the face of its own accelerated decline, is one of those organizations attempting to deliver the last rites to evangelicalism on British campuses.

"Faiths Together on Campus' is planning to bring together Catholic, Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Sikh societies at universities together with chaplaincies to create religious tolerance and respect. A draft paper now available on the Internet, on the website of the University Church of Oxford, St Mary's, lumps Christian Unions (CUs) and the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) together with cults which use brainwashing techniques.

"Furthermore, the paper, written by 'a senior Muslim chaplain,' claims that CMF and CUs are flouting the 1998 Human Rights Act by insisting that student leaders assent to a doctrinal statement.

"The paper calls this a 'discriminatory doctrinal test excluding Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, liberal Protestants and many other Christians, who as a matter of faith and conscience, are unable to sign it.' Such a test, it is argued, enables extreme factions to keep a 'stranglehold' over certain student religious societies, and to stifle varied opinions.

"And not only that, 'Faiths Together on Campus', which hopes to set up groups in British universities next year to monitor religious tolerance on campuses, has produced a Code of Practice for religious organizations that they want universities and Student Unions to adopt. This Code of Practice argues that no religious organizations should discriminate in their rules for either membership or leadership, on grounds of religious belief - a daft idea that could see a Muslim heading up the Catholic Society or a Conservative leading the Socialist Worker's Party.

"A CLEAR ATTACK ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM"

"It is amazing that a paper drafted by a Muslim should be so clearly directed against Christian evangelism, with a few passing mentions of Islamic or Jewish extremists. The agenda is clear, as it always is, with such initiatives, the only kind of religion which is not to be tolerated is evangelical Christian belief. Under the guise of tolerance, we have a clear attack on religious freedom.

"I'd be tempted to dismiss this lunacy as typical of a certain type of student outlook. Such students are free of the home for the first time, and in a welter of new ideas and experiences they seek security in the discarded ideas of a previous generation, thinking that they are the first to think rebelliously. In their immature universe they cannot hold more than one idea in their heads at the same time, holding that if one is true the other is not to be tolerated.

"If such young students, with a sense of their own self-importance, had headed the Spanish Inquisition we would have had many more martyrs. I should know: I was one of these ludicrous students, myself.

"But the paper is apparently written by a University of Oxford Muslim chaplain, and is on the website of a leading Anglican Church in Oxford. The Catholic Student Council, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, the National Union of Students, the Student Christian Movement and the Union of Jewish Students have all given their support to this initiative.

"I have been unable so far to find anything else about it. Its origins are shady but its future appears to be rather sinister and threatening to religious freedom - precisely the objective it is supposed to ensure," Carey wrote.

A response the following week came in the form of a letter signed by various leading evangelicals in the UK as a follow-up to Andrew Carey's article.

It was titled: "Christians and universities."

It states: "We are writing to develop the points made in the article by Andrew Carey (April 12) with regard to attempts to restrict evangelical Christian teaching on university campuses.

"Let us be quite clear. All religions have the inherent legal right to propagate their faith. Proselytizing has heightened protection under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Kokkinakis vs. Greece (1993) and university institutions may not deny access to evangelical groups to their 'information networks' and facilities (Soldaten vs. Austria (1995).

"Freedom of religion to evangelize is a type of freedom of speech which is given specific protection in the United Kingdom in relation to educational establishments under section 43 of the Education (No.2) Act 1986. This means that higher educational establishments simply cannot prevent the dissemination of the Gospel. Christians must therefore be robust in exercising this important freedom.

"The Government does have the discretion to proscribe organizations that conflict with a general neutral provision of the criminal law; whilst this might apply to a small number of Islamic groups, it is inconceivable that it will apply to mainstream Christian groups.

"With regard to the assertion that it is discriminatory and, thus, contrary to the Human Rights Act, for Christian societies to exclude individuals who do not conform to a statement of faith, nothing could be further from the truth.

"Freedom of association implies the negative right of freedom not to associate with individuals one does not wish to (Webster vs. UK (1984). There is simply no right to belong to an organization that does not want you as a member. The Conservative Party can exclude a Labour activist and vice versa.

"The disturbing trend is the discrimination against Christians and this must be resisted at all levels; politically, socially and legally."

Paul Diamond, Barrister; Andrea Williams, Lawyers Christian Fellowship; Peter Saunders, Christian Medical Fellowship; Rose Dowsett, UCCF; and Don Horrocks, Evangelical Alliance, signed the letter.

"We are waiting to see what the Muslims are planning to do before we go ahead," said Jay.

"We have the law on our sides, as the second article above explains, and the organization of Christian Lawyers here in the UK will take it to court if it goes that far. Meanwhile I continue to do debates, and have one planned for tomorrow afternoon at Kingston University, with the leader of the Ahmadiyya group here in London on the beauty of the Bible and the Qur'an," Smith said.

The Smiths said: "Pray that this ban will not go through, and for our continued freedom to evangelize on university campuses right across the UK."

Further information on the work of the Smith's can be obtained from 'Brethren in Christ World Missions' at the address below. For prayer or support, you may contact them through:

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Smith's websites: <http://debate.org.uk>

<http://www.bic-church.org/wm/global/eng.htm>