

Concerns migrants are faking religious conversions at Liverpool Cathedral to help asylum claims

From the [Telegraph](#)

Concerns have been raised over the role Liverpool Cathedral has played in helping asylum seekers convert to Christianity in order to help their applications.

☒ Hundreds of Muslims – including suicide bomber Emad Al Swealmeen – have been welcomed into the Church of England in recent years after completing a short five-week course at the city's Anglican cathedral. *I'm sure it used to be longer; it felt longer when I took it, MANY years ago.*

But critics have questioned how many of those converting have done so in order to help their asylum applications with the Home Office. If an applicant can show they are a committed Christian it could help their claim to stay in the UK because their faith might mean they are more at risk if forced to return to their home country. Converting to Christianity is also evidence of the applicant's success in integrating into Western society.

But questions have been raised over the ease with which asylum seekers are able to exploit the cathedral's services in order to assist with their application. Officials from the cathedral, which hosts regular services for Muslim worshippers considering changing faith, has also supported asylum applications for a number of people seeking to remain in the UK. But even those involved with the process have acknowledged that not all those seeking to convert are genuine.

Mohammad Eghtedarian, himself a Muslim convert who was later ordained and served as a curate at Liverpool Cathedral warned in 2016 that some people were pretending to convert in order to exploit the system.

The Rev Pete Wilcox, a former Dean of Liverpool, also said at the time: "I can't think of a single example of somebody who already had British citizenship converting here with us from Islam to Christianity."

Sam Ashworth-Hayes, director of studies at the Henry Jackson Society, said the Home Office must look into the issue as a matter of urgency. He said: "We know that people are willing to lie to win asylum up to and including faking religious conversions. This is incentivised by the asylum system, which does not do enough to root out fakes. The Home Office and Security Services should investigate the Liverpool Cathedral convert cluster."

Telegraph comment [here](#)

It would be fruitless and unhelpful at this stage to speculate about the motivations of this spectacularly inept terrorist. Nevertheless, without seeking to cast uninformed aspersions on the sincerity or otherwise of his alleged religious conversion, it's worth pointing out that for decades, optimistic asylum seekers have cited their newfound faith as a reason not to remove them to their intolerant home countries.

As a newly-elected MP after 2001, I and other newbies were briefed by Home Office officials and ministers about the various tactics that people traffickers recommended to their "clients" during the long, arduous journey from the Middle East to Britain.

...a crucial piece of advice offered to many claimants by their traffickers was to get involved in a local church as soon as they made their initial asylum claim and were allocated their temporary accommodation. A full-on conversion to Christianity

was even better, though not always necessary; British people who attend church were, it was assumed, much more likely to take up the cases of asylum seekers and advocate on behalf of those who made the effort to attend services along with their families.

Time and again I was invited by church leaders and members to explain and defend government policy on asylum. Such meetings were often fraught: incredulous people would get angry at my refusal to accede to their view that personal testimonies were always 100 per cent accurate. Repeatedly I pointed out that there were individuals whose testimonies about their backgrounds and origins could not always be taken at face value. The reaction was almost always hostile: who would believe a politician over someone who volunteers to serve the tea after Sunday evening service?

In truth, it was virtually impossible to deny the fact that if an applicant claimed to have converted from Islam to Christianity following his arrival in Britain, it would be the equivalent of a death sentence to remove them back to their home countries where the Islamic authorities dealt mercilessly with apostates.

It's impossible to judge whether conversion experiences are genuine – a fact upon which the people traffickers and their unfortunate and exploited customers rely. But it would be a courageous individual who decided that no one would seek to pull the wool over the eyes of the British authorities and try to secure permanent residency here by claiming something they did not genuinely believe.

Rather than see churches and their members as pliant dupes willing to believe any sob story told them by new arrivals in the country, we should celebrate the fact that we still have groups of people willing to give up their time to advocate on behalf of others by virtue of their own commitment to biblical principles. The corollary of those qualities, however, is a

necessary cynicism by the authorities: respecting the right of Christians to represent the cases of members of their flock does not mean every demand for a positive asylum decision should be met.