

Koran row imam suggested Muslims could be punished for celebrating Christmas

Some people [have more patience than I did to plough](#) through enough of his sermons. From [The Telegraph](#).

An imam involved in the row over a damaged Koran that led to a 14-year-old schoolboy receiving death threats, spoke about punishing Muslims for celebrating Christmas, The Telegraph can reveal.



Imam Hafiz Muhammad Mateen Anwar, of the Jamia Masjid Swafia mosque in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, warned worshippers not to wish others a merry Christmas, described homosexuality as “barbaric” and music as “toxic”, and also made sectarian remarks about more liberal followers of Islam.

Imam Anwar appeared on a panel with Chief Insp Andy Thornton and Insp Glen Costello of West Yorkshire Police, two teachers and the boy’s mother, where he told the meeting: “When it comes to the honour of the Koran we will stand and defend the honour of the Koran no matter what it takes.”

However, sources alarmed at what they described as “a session for ritual humiliation and threatening language” have now shared with The Telegraph evidence that they said showed the imam had preached “harsh social separatism”. Experts have also criticised the police for failing to do their “due diligence” in researching the imam’s comments.

The evidence bundle reveals that in a sermon three days before

Christmas last year, Imam Anwar said that in an Islamic state, Muslims would be punished for taking part in the festivities of another religion.

Quoting a Muslim scholar, he added: "The one who conforms with the disbelievers on the days of their celebrations should be given "tazir", a punishment...

He said that he lived in the UK, where there was not Sharia law, but said: "What I'm trying to explain to you is how important these scholars took the subject of copying the disbelievers, of following their celebrations. One who congratulates a non-believer on the day of their celebration is also to be punished."

Imam Anwar said that Christmas was not religious and told the congregation not to take part in Christian traditions, saying: "The disbelievers, in reality we can't really call them Christians anymore because they don't even follow the actual religion of Christianity. Christmas is a festivity, there is no link to it with religion. Having a family meal is perfectly fine, feed people, spread peace, but to call it a Christmas dinner on Christmas Day, don't go snapping away [on] Instagram to show people that you are multicultural. Who are you trying to impress?"

He added that Muslims "should have no link with Christmas trees or Christmas lights either" and said that those who rarely gave food to neighbours but did so on Christmas Day were "acknowledging their celebration", saying: "You are not permitted to do that."

Imam Anwar also said that parents should not allow children to sit on Santa's lap, not to be part of nativity shows and that if worshippers greeted someone on the day of a Muslim celebration "the first thing he is going to do is dial 999. We've got a terrorist, please come quickly. Why do you need to say merry Christmas back? What are they going to give you? You

want to be multicultural, you want to fit into society, then when someone says merry Christmas, say thank you, have a nice holiday. You don't need to turn around and say merry Christmas."

In another sermon, he urged Muslims to remember hatred, saying: "Your love and your hate should be for the sake of Allah." In a similar talk he used the word "rafidhis" for Shia Muslims, a derogatory term meaning rejectors and popular with hardline scholars, and also criticised "closet Shias" for "destroying our aqeedah [creed]".

He has also described music as "toxic" saying it "messes with your mind" and urged Muslims not to listen to it. He also described "the rise of homosexuality" as "barbaric".

Responding to his comments, Dr Paul Stott, head of security and extremism at Policy Exchange, said: "Many in Wakefield and beyond will find the words of Imam Anwar unpleasant, but hardly surprising. . . If these words are damaging for Imam Anwar and Swafia Mosque, they raise very troubling questions about West Yorkshire Police, two of whose officers were seen chumming up to the mosque in videos that have circulated worldwide. If it is to have any prospect of regaining the credibility it has lost, West Yorkshire Police will need to start choosing its friends more wisely."

Charlotte Littlewood, research fellow at the Henry Jackson Society, said: "In a bid to appear tolerant, a councillor and the police have worked with and sat alongside, even given praise to those who spread intolerance. The police and local authority should have done their due diligence and worked with the school rather than this mosque and this particular imam. They may have intended to ease tension and promote cohesion but their approach will have the opposite effect."

Imam Anwar and West Yorkshire Police were contacted for comment.