

Manchester's leading Imam has confirmed that he thinks the execution of sexually active gay men is justified. Mr. Arshad Misbahi, who is based at the Manchester Central Mosque, confirmed his views in a conversation to Dr John Casson, a local psychotherapist.

Dr Casson said: "I asked him if the execution of gay Muslims in Iran and Iraq was an acceptable punishment in Sharia law, or the result of culture, not religion. He told me that in a true Islamic state, such punishments were part of Islam: if the person had had a trial, at which four witnesses testified that they had seen the actual homosexual acts."

"I asked him what would be the British Muslim view? He repeated that in an Islamic state these punishments were justified. They might result in the deaths of thousands but if this deterred millions from having sex, and spreading disease, then it was worthwhile to protect the wider community."

"I checked again that this was not a matter of tradition, culture or local prejudice. 'No,' he said, 'It is part of the central tenets of Islam: that sex outside marriage is forbidden; this is stated in the Koran and the prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had stated that these punishments were due to such behaviours.'"

"He told me that no Muslim would have spoken to him as I had done - they would have been too afraid, ashamed or inhibited: he admired my courage and openness."

Commenting on Imam Arshad Misbahi's views, Dr John Casson said:

"I support the human rights of all people peacefully to practice their religion, including the right of Muslim women to wear the veil if they choose. Equally gay men and women must enjoy their rights to be themselves without the fear of being beaten, killed or judged by homophobic religious people."

Gay and human rights campaigner, Peter Tatchell, of the gay rights group OutRage!, added: "It is disturbing that some British imams are openly endorsing the execution of gay and lesbian Muslims. Imam Arshad Misbahi's homophobic attitudes give comfort and succour to queer-bashers. They encourage conflict and disharmony between Manchester's large gay and Muslim communities. Muslim and gay people know the pain of prejudice and discrimination. We should be working together to challenge homophobia and Islamophobia. I hope liberal Muslims will speak out in defence of the human rights of lesbians and gay men."



SUBMISSION & DENIAL

Gay Muslim group Imaan walk a fine line between asserting their sexuality and being faithful to their religious tradition. They think they're in the same boat as their Christian & Jewish counterparts. They're not, says Brett Lock.

Many gay campaigners are slated as "Islamophobic" by members of the gay Muslim group Imaan. They say non-Muslim gay activists disproportionately criticise Islam and unjustly suggest that Islam is uniquely homophobic. Of course it isn't - all Abrahamic religions share a deeply homophobic tradition. But most Islam is unique in the extreme nature of its homophobia.

Mainstream Christian priests and Jewish rabbis do not support the death penalty for homosexuality. But mainstream Muslim imams in many parts of the world say gay people should be put to death. In Islamic states, like Iran and Saudi Arabia, same-sex relations carry a death sentence. Even the Christian fundamentalists in Washington DC don't advocate hanging queers. Nor do the ultra-evangelical groups in the UK, like the Christian Institute and the Evangelical Alliance. They may support the homophobic "love the sinner, hate the sin" line, but they don't offer a theological justification for executing gays. Not even far right Christian homophobes like Stephen Green of Christian Voice or Archbishop Akinola of Nigeria endorse killing queers.

Arshad Mishabi, a Manchester imam, recently justified the execution of gay people. The Islamic Party of Britain also favours the death penalty for gay sex. Is there a Christian or Jewish cleric in this country who backs the killing of gays, here or anywhere? Of course not. The revelation that this imam thought gays should be killed provoked the following reaction on the Imaan discussion board: "*It is a complete non story. The Bible and Torah say homosexual should be stoned to death. So what? ... as a gay Muslim, I fully support the right of Imam Arshad Mishabi to state what is his view on Islamic Law relating to adultery and homosexuality, even if I may disagree with his interpretation.*"

This is exactly the same line supporters of Mayor Ken Livingstone trotted out when he hosted the homophobic Muslim cleric, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who justifies the execution of gays in Islamic states. "Most

major religions have similar views on homosexuality," argued one defender of Qaradawi. No they don't! They may be similar in that they regard homosexuality as a sin, but mainstream Christianity and Judaism certainly do not suggest that gays should be put to death, as do mainstream Muslim clerics in many parts of the world. There are fringe Christian fanatics, like Rev. Fred Phelps in the US, but he's regarded as just that - a loner and fanatic!

Members of Imaan are gravely mistaken if they think that when a Muslim cleric says gays should be killed - even if only from a theoretical theological position - he is expressing a view shared by Jewish and Christian leaders.

Gay Christians and Jews do not have to appear at London Pride in disguise or, as Imaan's chair has done on TV, wearing a niqab, with her name changed and her voice electronically altered.

If you want to know who chairs the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) and where their offices are, you just go to their website. They don't have to hold their conferences at secret venues, like Imaan does. They even advertise in mainstream Christian newspapers. In contrast, Imaan is forced to organise in secret like an underground dissident group in the former Soviet Union. Many Imaan members live in fear of violent retribution from homophobic fellow Muslims. Members of LGCM, in contrast, don't fear violent attacks by fellow Christians.

If some of Imaan's leaders feel Islam is being unfairly singled out as "uniquely reactionary", perhaps they should ask themselves when they last heard a priest or a rabbi in Britain defending the death penalty for homosexuality. They should ask themselves why they have to slink around in the shadows using false names and disguises.

Yes, all major religions are homophobic, but it is also a fact that the debate in Islam on the subject of homosexuality is decades behind Christianity and Judaism. It's time Imaan faced up to this sad reality.