

I'll be celebrating Christmas too

THIS Christmas, I'll have a Christmas tree in my shop, I'll be sending and receiving Christmas cards, and my family will be exchanging gifts. But I am a Muslim.

If you believed everything you read in the newspapers, you might be surprised to hear that. The popular misconception is that those of other faiths are somehow offended by Christians celebrating at Christmas – so much so that people have felt the need to change the name of the entire festival.

Nothing could be further from the truth. No one I know is offended by Christians marking the festival symbolising the birth of Jesus, just as I hope Christians are not offended by Muslims celebrating Eid or Hindus celebrating Diwali, etc.

As a Muslim, I don't find some of the secular adornments – such as Christmas trees or Santa's

the big issue



Taki Jaffer, who co-ordinates Portsmouth's Interfaith Forum, explains why those of other faiths are unlikely to be offended by Christians celebrating the birth of Jesus this Christmas - whatever politically-correct bureaucrats may think!

grottos – particularly symbolic, as they are no kind of threat or hindrance to my beliefs.

But I'm certainly happy to mark the birth of Jesus, who Muslims call Prophet Isa. We read about him in the Holy Koran, and his birth is of such importance to us that a whole chapter in the Holy Koran is dedicated to talk about him and his mother Mary.

What I do have problem with is the zeal of the bureaucrats who think they know what will offend me.

In their desire to be politically correct, they ban some of the

paraphernalia of Christmas on the grounds that it may offend. Actually, it causes more friction and animosity than the issue itself.

The Christian Muslim Forum - which was set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury - agrees. It says that local authorities who choose to ban the word 'Christmas' play into the hands of right-wing extremists who then blame Muslims for undermining Britain's Christian culture.

In fact, I would consider it to be a shame if there was any watering down of the Christmas

festival. It's a time when people come together in celebration – when families, friends and colleagues meet up.

People smile at each other, greet each other warmly and are more cheerful. This creates a good atmosphere and is an ideal time for those of all faiths to come together and join in, in a spirit of joy, compassion, friendship, love and peace.

I have found that by coming together at times like these, it helps to strengthen and re-establish the bonds of friendship, to show kindness and warmth to each other, not only by the exchanging of gifts, but in the exchange of values of being a good neighbour.

The Holy Koran says: "We have been made into nations and tribes so that we may know and respect one another." Is this not what all the major religions have in common or, for that matter, the basis of our common humanity?

Some of the Christmas cards I send out are of a 'Muslim' nature,

with the text being translations from the Holy Koran.

This enables us to join in the festive period and at the same time has the advantage of showing that as Muslims we do not have an issue with the celebration of Christmas.

We need to be alongside each other to learn about each other. If I were only to impose my ways, then I would be segregating myself from others and losing the opportunity to show to them the true me and what I believe in.

As long as I have not compromised my values and beliefs, I should be willing to let others celebrate and maybe even join in.

My wish for this festive season, is, that we all live together in peace, tranquillity and in harmony, with patience and respect towards each other; knowing that we are all neighbours in this world, submitting to the will of God.

God bless you all - and I hope you have a happy Christmas!



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