

Has the Church Embraced the Mindset of Sharia Law in Abuse Cases?

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In 2008, the United Nations condemned the stoning to death of a 13 year old girl for fornication. Her crime? She was gang raped and then sentenced to death by a Sharia court.

In 2013, a Norwegian woman was visiting Dubai on business and was raped by a Muslim man. When she reported the rape, she was arrested, tried and convicted by a Sharia court. She was sentenced to jail time before finally being pardoned by the Dubai monarch.

In Bangladesh, raped women are often convicted by Sharia courts for the crime of being raped.

What does this have to do with A Cry For Justice and abuse, you may ask? Isn't the focus of this site about domestic abuse and the handling of it by church leaders? Yes, it is; however, what I wish to show is how the way the church often deals with abuse, and those who divorce because of abuse has some similarities with the mindset and philosophy of Sharia law. Please note that I am not calling anyone in the Christian community an Islamist or terrorist, but am only trying to show that the psychology behind the way we treat victims is strikingly similar to radical, fundamentalist Islam.

Let's examine first the general view of Sharia law toward women in general. Under Sharia, a woman is considered less trustworthy and of less value than a man. This is clear from Qur'an (2:282) where it states that a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man's in court. In other words, a woman is automatically discounted when she testifies about rape. This is proven by the fact that a woman who alleges rape must have no less than four male witnesses to the event who will testify that the man forced himself upon her Qur'an (24:4 and 13). Note that in these types of cases, the testimony of women is not even allowed, only men.

Contrast that with the way that many churches treat a woman who accuses her husband of abuse. Too often, she is required to meet a burden of proof that is impossible. It is not uncommon for a pastor or elder board to require witnesses to abuse, but since most abuse occurs in secret, there often are no witnesses. If the abuse is primarily emotional, then there are no scars or bruises to prove the woman's story. Compounding this is the almost endemic belief system in many churches that the woman is automatically suspect because women are considered overly emotional and thus unreliable. Forget the fact that the abuse has taken a huge emotional toll on the woman such that, by the time she reaches out for help, she is desperate while the abuser comes across as cool and level headed. For this and other reasons, the man seems automatically to be believed and the woman blamed for the misdeeds of her husband. (More about blame shifting in a bit)

In Sharia law, the woman is considered a sexual object. Her whole body is "Awrah", which is essentially Arabic for genitalia. The mere sight of this inflames a man into an

uncontrollable sexual urge (according to Islamic belief), which is why they want their women to be covered from head to toe and not leave the house (in the more extreme sects). This is also the excuse they use to say that a woman who was raped caused the rape by simply being present in front of Muslim men. In other words, it was all her fault. Just by the fact that she exists, she is the cause of all a man's sexual misconduct.

How does the church often treat abused women? They are told that they caused the abuse by not doing the right things. They weren't submissive enough or they didn't keep the house clean enough or didn't look pretty enough for their man. Perhaps, she did not gratify him sexually as much as he "needed". Many abusive men will shift blame to even subtle nuances of the way a woman looks at him, or a perceived sarcasm in her tone of voice. She made me angry! She made me lose control! Like in Sharia law, it is all her fault!

In a similar vein, Sharia law looks on the woman as the property of her husband. In practice, a Muslim woman is subject to anything that her husband wants to do to her, at least sexually. Qur'an (2:223) states that a woman "...is as tilth to you, so approach your tilth when or how ye will...". Tilth is the Arabic word for arable soil, so the Qur'an is saying that the woman is property to the man, to be plowed and planted as he will. Essentially, there is no such thing as marital rape.

In some Christian circles, especially the patriarchy types, this same attitude seems to prevail not only sexually, but in other ways. We have heard of stories of Christian women who were expected to bend to a husband's sexual desires whenever or in whatever way he wishes. To deny the husband, in any way or for almost any reason is considered sin. In addition, some in the patriarchy movement have even been known to spank their wives, treat them as children and to "punish" them mercilessly because they are not much more than property. Of course, Scripture is used to support this. When it is brought up to the church, almost invariably the wife is punished and forced to go back into the torment she is trying to escape from.

When a woman is raped under Shariah law, she often receives much greater punishment than the man. In fact, under most applications of this part of Shariah, if it cannot be proven that the man was violent, using the impossible bar set by the same law, the worst punishment he will receive is to pay her financially. That is it. No jail. No beating, just some money. The woman on the other hand is subject to the death penalty if married and 100 lashes if single. The woman is also shunned, becomes a social outcast, brings dishonor on the family and is considered unsuitable for marriage. In some countries, it is a reason for honor killings and many women in Islam commit suicide after such incidents.

How does the church handle abuse, and especially divorce from abuse? Women are excommunicated and shunned. They are sometimes disowned or at least psychologically abused by their families. They are considered unsuitable for church service and marriage as they are seen as adulterers and living in sin. While stoning and lashes are not handed out in the physical sense, they are spiritually and psychologically stoned or beaten. While I cannot say for sure that suicides have happened, we hear from women who tell us they nearly suicided because of the domestic abuse, so it stands to reason that some women have carried out the deed. And I can say that spiritual suicide has happened. We see many

stories of women (and men) who have given up on God or church because of the way they were treated!

These are just a few examples of the similarities between the two groups. Women who suffer rape in Islam are disbelieved, counted as unworthy and second class. The burden of proof is so stringent that almost no victim can ever hope to overcome it. The rape is almost always their fault. They are punished severely, while the man often gets off with little or no punishment. They are considered chattel and all the blame is placed upon them.

The same is true in many churches. The abused are disbelieved. The burden of proof is impossible. Because of the misapplication of several verses, they are blamed because they did not follow the rules. They are punished severely while the man barely gets a reprimand. They lose their families, friends, jobs, and spiritual support. They are often forced into poverty. Worst of all, they can lose hope.

Questions for the church

My questions are directed at the church and especially to church leaders in the permanence and patriarchy crowd. Do you really want to be tied to the same attitudes as those in radical Islam? Do you not care for the humanity of the victims of abuse, or are they, like in Sharia law, only women or just property to be dealt with as the man (the head of the house) sees fit? Do you not see how your views, that women must remain with their abusers or that they must be at fault or share the blame for the abuse, are actually destroying them?

Do you not have eyes to see or ears to hear that you are engaging in the same evil, just with a Christian face, and more spiritualized, as Sharia? What will it take for you to see that you have set up a system of law that makes you feel all righteous, but destroys precious people?

Matthew 12:20 in the NLT reads:

He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. Finally he will cause justice to be victorious.

When will the church stop crushing those among us who are victims of abuse? When will they cease snuffing out their spirits, all in the name of law? When will the church finally start acting like Jesus?