

INTERCEDE

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What is Sharia?



Note: We are grateful to Barnabas Fund for granting us permission to print articles on Muslim sharia law — first published as supplements to their magazine. This series is intended to provide background information for Christians seeking to understand the nature of Islam and its contemporary expression. One aspect of this relates to understanding the reason for the oppression and persecution of Christians and Muslim converts in various parts of the Islamic world, and another to the growing challenge which Islam poses to Western society, culture and the Church.

Introduction

“It is through the sharia, commonly translated as ‘Islamic Law’ that Islam is expressed in Muslim societies. If Islam is submission to the Will of God, then sharia is the path by which submission is enacted, the actual route map of religion

as a way of life. Hence, for many Muslims, Islam is the sharia and the sharia is Islam.” (Ziauddin Sardar, *Desperately Seeking Paradise*, London, Granta Books, 2004, pp. 216-217).

In the twenty-first century there are increasing calls for greater sharia-compliance in the West, especially in the United Kingdom, and for full sharia to be practised in more Muslim-majority countries.

Sharia is an Arabic word meaning “path” or “way”. Nowadays it is used to mean “Islamic law” the detailed system of religious law developed by Muslim scholars in the first three centuries of Islam. This law expresses the Islamic way of life and – much more than the Qur’an – is the key to understanding Islam. Sharia covers all aspects of life and

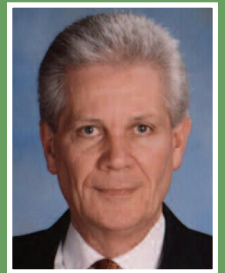
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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett
Center for
Ministry to Muslims




Recently I asked a “moderate” Muslim university professor in the U.S. if he would be in favor of sharia law in America. His answer was troubling: “It would be an interesting experiment,” he said. A Muslim convert to Christianity related the following: “The mosque I attended in the U.S. was always abuzz with talk of how to live [in a non-Muslim majority country] according to the sharia.”

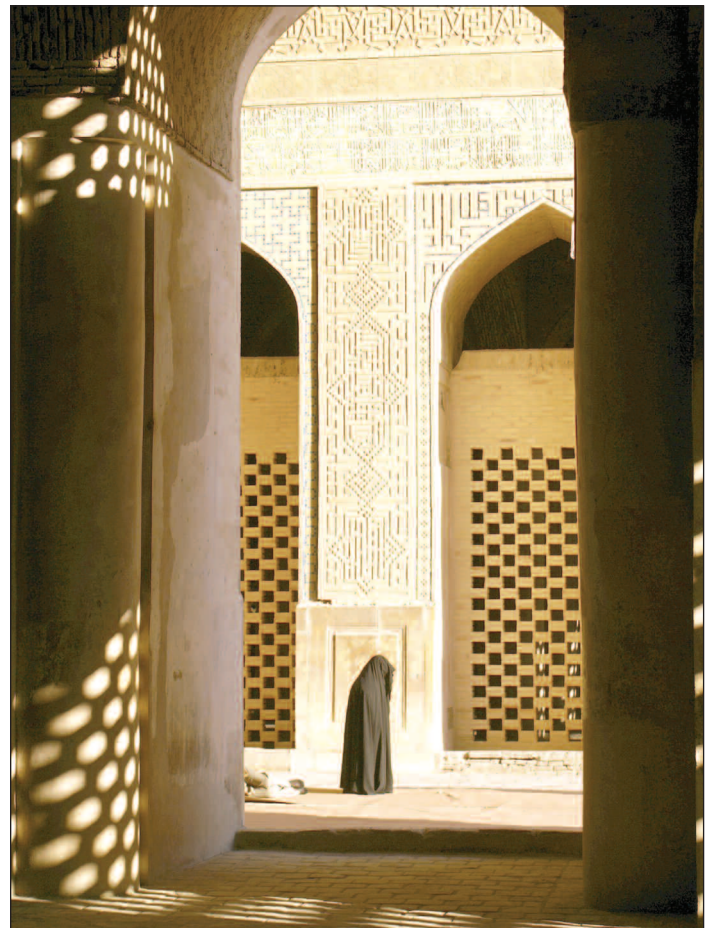
While we do not wish to be alarmist in calling attention to the possibility of what I call *creeping sharia* influence in the West, it does behoove us to be informed. The lead article in this issue of *Intercede* is the first in a series that will deal with Islamic sharia law. The emphasis on sharia is intended to provide background information for those seeking to understand the nature of Islam and its contemporary expression in the West.

Since the beginning of the year, *Institutes of Islamic Studies* have been conducted in Amsterdam, El Salvador, the Philippines, Romania and two sites in Indonesia. IIS programs began 10 years ago and have since “mushroomed.” Here is a recent comment about an IIS from a leader in a large Muslim country:

I am ecstatic about the results of this past IIS and can really see the impact that it is having in so many church planters’ lives. I saw significant lights going on in the majority of the participants I sent. The sessions were superb in bringing a fresh and culturally appropriate model for many areas where the church has not been able to penetrate. The emphasis on the practical and application focus was really great. After the Friday service and prayers, I talked with one young man I am mentoring who is a Muslim background believer who has just recently been baptized. With tears in his eyes he said, “Now I know...” This young man is in the process of sharing the gospel with his family and friends and has had a revolutionary salvation experience and journey. I think his response

sums up what many attending were experiencing. Many of them simply have never known HOW to share or how to really relate effectively with their friends and families. IIS is the most significant tool we have for opening up eyes and hearts to the reality of how to impact our Muslim country. If every pastor and leader could attend and be impacted like we were this year, the results would be staggering.

We are grateful to the Lord for the impact of IIS programs around the world. In 2010 we will add two more IIS programs — in Argentina and India! Please pray for: (1) A fresh anointing on the planning process, the teachers and the students, and (2) The finances needed to cover the many expenses related to each IIS program. 



Muslim World News



Somalia

LONG-TIME CHRISTIAN SLAIN IN SOMALIA

The faith journey of a long-time underground Christian in Somalia ended when Islamic militants killed him after finding Bibles in his possession. Militants from the Muslim extremist al Shabaab killed 69-year-old Omar Khalafe at a checkpoint. Leaving Mogadishu by bus at 7:30 a.m., Khalafe was carrying 25 Bibles he hoped to deliver to an underground fellowship. By 10:30 a.m. he had arrived at a checkpoint controlled by al Shabaab, a rebel group linked with al Qaeda. A source in Somalia told *Compass* the passengers were ordered off the bus. The Islamic militants found the Bibles in one of the passengers' bags; when they asked to whom they belonged, the passengers responded with silence. The militants found photos in the bag and saw that Khalafe resembled a face in one of them. They asked Khalafe if he was the owner of the Bibles; he kept quiet. They shot him to death. — *Compass*

Pakistan

ALL PAKISTANI STUDENTS REQUIRED TO STUDY ISLAM

The new guidelines for school students in Pakistan require non-Muslims to study Islam and ignore other religious traditions in the country. The program, drawn up by the government, contemplates that Islamiyat (Islamic studies) become compulsory until the 12th class (15 and 16 years). For students that from then on will not want to follow the lessons of Islam, attendance of alternative courses of public ethics is permitted, but the Commission notes the discrimination, though latent, is clear. The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) states that for non-Muslim children who do not attend the Islamiyat class "there is a risk of isolation from the rest of the class." The courses are based on texts that address issues from the Muslim perspective without considering traditions of different faiths. They also contain biases, errors and falsehoods about non-Muslim religions. — *Asian News*

Bangladesh

CONVERT FROM ISLAM THREATENED WITH DEATH

William Gomes, a Catholic convert from Islam, has been the target of Muslim extremists who want to kill him because of his new faith. On Sept. 25, he had to flee his home to escape from a group of Islamic militants who wanted to kill him and his family (wife and child), setting fire to their house. After Friday prayers at a mosque nearby, a group of fanatics had asked the leaders of their mosque to decide on the fate of the young man and the penalty to be inflicted on him. A freelance journalist and human rights activist, married to a Catholic and father of a child, Gomes had recently received threats, but on Sept. 25, his accusers passed from words to deeds. A group marched on the house of the young man accused of apostasy. The human rights activist sought police protection, but officers of the Police Commission in Jatrabri limited themselves to filing his complaint — *Asian News*



does not separate between secular and religious spheres. It provides a framework of dos and don'ts, rituals and rules within which a Muslim leads his or her life. Most Muslims hold that sharia protects them from sin like a fence or a roadblock. It also serves as an identity marker separating Muslims from non-Muslims. Sharia influences the behaviour and worldview of most Muslims, even in secular states where it forms no part of the law of the land.

The Perfect Divine Norm

Most Muslims believe that sharia, as God's revealed law, perfect and eternal, is binding on individuals, society and state in all its details. They therefore believe that any criticism of sharia is heresy. Most Sunni Muslims believe it to be completely unchangeable, although Shi'as allow for the possibility of interpreting and adapting it to new circumstances. Muslims who deny the validity of sharia or criticise it in any way are labelled as non-Muslims (infidels, apostates) by traditionalists and Islamists. As such they face the threat of being prosecuted as apostates, a crime that carries the death penalty in sharia.

Development and Characteristics of Sharia

Sharia systematises all human acts: Sharia is a complex

legal system derived from the Islamic source texts Qur'an and hadith (traditions of Muhammad's words and deeds) through interpretation, commentary and case law. It was created in a context in which Muslims held political power, and thus lacks guidance for Muslims living as a minority under non-Muslims. Sharia tries to describe in detail all possible human acts, dividing them into permitted (halal) and prohibited (haram). It subdivides them into various degrees of good or evil such as obligatory, recommended, neutral, objectionable or forbidden. It is a vast compendium of rules, regulating in detail all matters of devotional life, worship, ritual purity, marriage and inheritance, criminal offences, commerce and personal conduct. It also regulates the governing of the Islamic state and its relations to non-Muslims within the state as well as to enemies outside the state.

Schools of law: Four Sunni orthodox schools of law, named after their founders, developed and were codified by the end of the tenth century. These are the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali schools. These schools differ somewhat in the way they arrive at legal decisions, but they accept each other as orthodox. The Shia version is very similar to the Sunni schools. The work of the founders was continued by their disciples, and over the centuries several widely accepted handbooks of law were composed by famous scholars. Modern Muslim jurists often differentiate between sharia as revealed divine law and fiqh, the jurist's interpretation of sharia.

Attempts at reform and the Islamist backlash: Since the nineteenth century there have been efforts at reforming sharia in a liberal direction in order to accommodate it to the modern world. Most reformers saw the return to the sources of Islam as the "golden key" that would cure Muslim societies of their backward state and political weakness. Many downgraded the authority of the four legal schools and of later traditions; this approach enabled jurists to select and mix from the different schools and to make the good of the community (maslaha) their ultimate guiding principle. Most such reformers stressed the importance of reason, and differentiated between a core of universal values in sharia that was unchangeable and eternal, and the larger part

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dealing with social relations that was open to change and adaptation to new contexts.

In the contemporary Muslim world, however, it is the traditionalists and especially the Islamists, upholders of the traditional view of sharia, who are dominating Muslim public opinion. This leaves liberal reformers as a small minority surviving mainly in the West. Liberal reformers face heavy pressure from Islamists and traditionalists who brand them apostates and infidels and attack them verbally, legally and physically.

Shari'a and modern standards: Muslims often claim that sharia was quite moderate by the standards of the seventh to tenth centuries when it was created. However it has remained unchanged since then, and is thus extremely harsh compared to modern Western standards. It infringes many modern principles of human rights, religious freedom and equality of all before the law. Sharia inherently discriminates against women, non-Muslims and "heretical Muslims" as well as against Muslims who choose to convert to another faith.

Five Main Areas in Which Sharia is Incompatible With Human Rights

1. Hudud punishments: These are the severe punish-

ments prescribed by sharia for some offences defined as being against God himself. The punishments for these crimes are seen as divinely ordained and cannot be changed by humans. These include 100 lashes or stoning to death for adultery; 80 lashes for false accusation of adultery; amputation of limbs for theft; 40 or 80 lashes for drinking alcohol; imprisonment, amputation or death (by crucifixion in serious cases) for highway robbery; and the death penalty for apostasy from Islam. Many Islamic scholars, academics and popular preachers support the present day application of hudud punishments, seeing them as identity markers of true Islamic revival. Well known Islamic scholars responded negatively to a call in March 2005 by the popular Islamist professor, Tariq Ramadan, for a temporary halt to hudud punishments. One claimed any attempt at softening sharia was giving in to Western Christian concepts.

2. Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims: Discrimination on the basis of religion is fundamental to sharia. Islam must be dominant and only Muslims are full citizens, so Muslims are treated as far superior to all others. Jews and Christians are defined as dhimmis (literally "protected" i.e. permitted to live). However this protection is on condition that they do not bear arms, know their lowly place in society, treat Muslims with respect, pay a special poll tax (jizya), and do not behave arrogantly. Numerous petty shari'a laws used to restrict and humiliate dhimmis in their daily lives. They could practise their faith inside their synagogues and churches but not in public places (bells were not allowed to be rung). No new church buildings were allowed, nor were existing churches to be repaired. Dhimmis could not testify in a sharia court against a Muslim. They could not share their faith with Muslims. They could not hold any public office that placed them in a position of authority over Muslims. At best, they could serve their Muslim rulers in administrative capacities. The general attitude of contempt for non-Muslims created by centuries of applying such laws means that even in modern secular Muslim states that have constitutionally guaranteed equal rights to all citizens, non-Muslims are discriminated against in numerous ways. Pagan non-Muslims were, in classical sharia, to be offered the choice of death or conversion to Islam.

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3. Muslim heretics and apostates: Muslims who accept teachings considered heretical by orthodox Islam are held by sharia to have reverted to paganism and therefore to deserve the death penalty. The same is true for Muslims converting to another religion (apostates), who are considered as traitors. All schools of sharia agree that adult male apostates from Islam should be killed. Even where the death sentence is not carried out, their marriages may be automatically dissolved and they face severe penalties such as exile, disinheritance, loss of possessions, threats, beatings, torture, and prison. Many liberal or secularist Muslims find themselves in danger of being classified as apostates for views which the religious establishment or militant Islamist groups hold to be heretical. Muslim “heretical” sects are severely persecuted. This is especially true of the Ahmadiyya sect in Pakistan and of the Bahai religion in Iran.

4. Holy War – jihad: Sharia lays down jihad as one of the most basic religious duties, clearly indicating by the regulations listed that jihad is understood as physical warfare. Linked to the concept of jihad is the division of the world into two opposing domains: the House of Islam (Dar al-Islam) and the House of War (Dar al-Harb). Muslims are supposed to wage jihad to change the House of War (where non-Muslims are politically

dominant) into the House of Islam, politically dominated by Muslims. While some modern Muslims reject this aggressive understanding of jihad, most Muslims agree that jihad includes defending Muslim territory and Muslims from any form of aggression; this leaves the door open to interpreting any conflict involving Muslims as a case of defensive jihad. Islamic terror groups justify their atrocities by references to the sharia rules on jihad.

5. Status of women: Sharia also discriminates on the basis of gender. Men are regarded as superior. Women are treated as deficient in intelligence, morals and religion, and must therefore be protected from their own weaknesses. Sharia rules enforce modesty in dress and behaviour and the segregation of genders. They place women under the legal guardianship of their male relatives. Women are inherently of less value than men in many legal rulings. A man is allowed up to four wives, but women can have only one husband. A man can divorce his wife easily; a woman faces great obstacles should she want a divorce from her husband. A daughter inherits half as much as a son, and the testimony of a female witness in court is worth only half that of a male witness. In cases of murder, the compensation for a woman is less than that given for a man.

In many Muslim societies gender segregation in public is imposed or encouraged. Sharia courts often display a clear gender bias. This is seen in the widespread practice of accusing rape victims of illicit sexual relations (zina), an offense which carries punishments ranging from imprisonment and flogging to death by stoning. The victim is thus transformed into a culprit. Large numbers of Pakistani rape victims are in prison because of this. In a few countries, for example, Turkey and Tunisia, secular codes have improved the situation for women. Recently Morocco passed a much more liberal version of the sharia family code which gives much more equality to women.

Note: Our next issue deals with The Challenge of Sharia in Western Countries and will highlight alternative legal frameworks, marriage and divorce, child marriages, polygamy, female genital mutilation, veiling and halal products.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims
Around the World.*



Friday, November 5, 2009. Please pray

...for a Christian couple arrested in Singapore and charged with sedition for sending out pamphlets with “the intent of convincing the Muslim reader to convert to Christianity.”

...for a church in Tanzania which is being threatened. The congregation has been expelled from their rented property due to evangelistic outreach toward Muslims.

...for Christian workers in the Maldives who are being forbidden from bringing Bibles into the country or even worshipping God in private.

Friday, November 12, 2009. Please pray

...for a new church in Qatar. It is the second church opened in Qatar this year. Pray that Qatari Muslims will come to know Jesus through these two churches.

...for the family of a Christian missionary shot dead in Mauritania by an Al-Qaeda affiliated group.

...for the Muslims of Uzbekistan. The government has banned the importation and distribution of all Bibles, hymn books and other Christian materials.

Friday, November 19, 2009. Please pray

...against proposed amendments in the constitution of Azerbaijan. If passed, the changes will ban all unlicensed religious education, distribution of Christian literature, and all religious meetings not receiving government approval.

...for the estimated 0.12 percent of Japan’s population that is Muslim. Muslim student associations are very active at Japanese universities.

...for the Muslims of New Zealand. Islam is the fastest growing religion among the native Maori community, with Muslim numbers increasing from 99 to 788 in the last 10 years.

Friday, November 26, 2009. Please pray

...for the continent of Africa. Oil money from the Arabian Gulf continues to fund mosques and schools at a rapid pace.

...for Christian workers in the U.S. and Canada. Pray they would seize opportunities to witness to Muslims that might not otherwise hear about the love of Jesus.

...for Christians in Kyrgyzstan. A government council has been established to shut down any church deemed as “radical” or “extremist.”

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. – 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims
Around the World.*



Friday, December 4, 2009. Please pray

...for Christians in Eritrea. Reports continue to flow out regarding government torture and killing of Christians.
...for Christians in Uzbekistan. They continue to be harassed and fined while trying to exercise their faith in Jesus.
...for Pakistan, where violence erupts frequently. Recently, another rumor of Qur'anic desecration spread; 14 Christians were killed and 100 homes burned.

Friday, December 11, 2009. Please pray

...for house churches in the Arabian Gulf. Pray that the Lord would continue watch over these diligent believers.
...for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard by Muslims in Syria.
...for the people of Bosnia. Authorities are calling more sharia law courts, and there is a general push by Muslim leaders toward a stronger government embrace of Islam.

Friday, December 18, 2009. Please pray

...for protection of the Church in Nigeria. Violence between Muslims and Christians continues.
...for the people of Kenya. The constitution has been revised to increase sharia law into all areas of life.
...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Muslims. Pray for a genuine move of the Lord through this medium.

Friday, December 25, 2009. Please pray

...for the country of Morocco. No Moroccan church has yet been recognized by the government.
...for the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. Coptics account for 10 percent of Egypt's population and are often a target of radical Islamic groups.
...for Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Iran. Persecution continues to be intense as Iranian MBBs face consistent threats of death or imprisonment.