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The Challenge of Sharia



Note: We are grateful to Barnabas Aid 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. Our last issue dealt with “What is Sharia?” For a brief review of the definition of sharia, see the inside editorial on page 2.

Sharia poses a challenge to Western societies because of the constant pressure in Muslim communities to implement it and expand its area of influence. For many Muslims in the West, secular law lacks legitimacy, especially in the realm of family law. A recent survey showed that two-thirds of British Muslims would prefer to follow sharia in cases where United Kingdom law conflicts with Islamic law.

Many Muslims claim they have the right as a religious minority to follow their own customs and laws, including sharia. There have been calls for partial incorporation of sharia into British civil law. Some Muslim groups have campaigned for the legal incorporation of Islamic family law into the British legal system. In 1990, the Muslim Institute suggested “the creation of a Muslim legal framework to decide cases that may then be recognized as valid in British law”.

Creation of a parallel alternative legal framework

Many Muslims in the West try to live by sharia regulations as far as possible, creating an unofficial enclave in which Islamic religious scholars and lawyers offer their services. This has created an alternative legal structure of sharia courts and councils.

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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



Sharia is an Arabic word meaning “path.” It refers to the detailed system of Islamic religious law developed by Muslim scholars in the first three centuries of Islam. Sharia covers all aspects of life and does not separate between secular and religious spheres. It provides a framework of dos-and-don’ts along with 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 roadblock. It also serves as an identity marker separating Muslims from non-Muslims. Sharia influences the behavior and worldview of most Muslims, even in secular states where it forms no part of the law of the land.

Our emphasis on sharia in this series of lead articles is intended to provide background information for those seeking to understand the nature of Islam and its contemporary expression in the West. In the 21st century there are increasing calls for greater sharia-compliance in the West, especially in the United Kingdom — but increasingly in the U.S.

Security and anti-terror measures

The problem of full veiling of the face for security and anti-terrorist measures is obvious. Yet the Council on American-Islamic Relations has managed to persuade the states of Kansas, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Montana and Washington to allow Muslim women to have their driving license photo taken with their faces veiled, showing their eyes only.

Death penalty mandated for converts from Islam to other faiths

In London in December of 2004 – after great pressure from Christian leaders – Prince Charles called a private meeting of Christian and Muslim leaders to seek ways to reform sharia apostasy law and end its compulsory death penalty for converts from Islam to other faiths.

A prominent Christian leader warned that converts from Islam might be killed in Britain unless Muslims leaders speak out openly on behalf of the right of individuals to change their faith. He added that it was still common for



those deemed apostates in Britain to be ostracized, to lose their jobs, and to have their marriages dissolved and their children taken away. The Muslim leaders cautioned the prince and other non-Muslims against speaking publicly on the issue because, they said, sharia comes from God and cannot be changed. They argued that Islamic moderates could have more influence on those upholding the traditional position if the debate remained internal.

The reluctance of Muslim leaders to deal openly with the problem reflects the widespread reluctance of Muslims to tamper with sharia — that is God’s law. Even those who may believe that the apostasy law needs to be reformed or abolished would need to be very courageous to say so in public. They might face accusations of heresy, blasphemy and apostasy, and thus put their own lives in danger. The Islamic law of apostasy has a profoundly negative impact on converts from Islam to Christianity in the West.



Muslim World News



Somalia

CHRISTIAN KILLED AFTER REFUSING TO WEAR VEIL

Three masked members of a militant Islamist group in Somalia shot and killed a Somali Christian who declined to wear a veil as prescribed by Muslim custom — according to a Christian source within Somalia.

Members of the comparatively “moderate” Suna Waljameca group killed Amina Muse Ali, 45, on Oct. 19, at 9:30 p.m., in her home in Galkayo, in Somalia’s autonomous Puntland region, said the source who requested anonymity for security reasons.

Ali had told Christian leaders that she had received several threats from members of Suna Waljameca for not wearing a veil — symbolic of adherence to Islam. She had reported members of the group had long monitored her movements because they suspected she was a Christian. The source said Ali had called him on Oct. 4 saying, “My life is in danger. I am warned of dire consequences if I

continue to live without putting on the veil. I need prayers from the fellowship.’ I was shocked beyond words when I received the news that she had been shot dead,” the source stated to *Compass*.

“I wished I could have recalled her to my location. We’ve lost a long-serving Christian.”

Suna Waljameca is considered “moderate” in comparison with al Shabaab, which it has fought against for control over areas of Somalia; it is one of several Islamic groups championing adoption of a strict interpretation of sharia (Islamic law).

It is unknown how many secret Christians there are in Somalia — *Compass* sources indicate there are no more than 75, while *The Economist* magazine hedges its estimate at “no more than” 1,000. However, what is certain is that they are in danger from both extremist groups and Somali law. While proclaiming himself to be a moderate, Somali President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed has embraced a version of sharia that

mandates the death penalty for those who leave Islam.

In August, al Shabaab extremists seeking evidence that a Somali man had converted from Islam to Christianity shot him dead near the Somali border with Kenya. The rebels killed 41-year-old Ahmed Matan in Bulahawa on Aug. 18.

In Mahadday Weyne, 62 miles north of the Somali capital of Mogadishu, al Shabaab Islamists on July 20 shot to death another convert from Islam, Mohammed Sheikh Abdiraman, eyewitnesses told *Compass*.

The militants also reportedly beheaded seven Christians on July 10. Reuters reported that they were killed in Baidoa for being Christians and “spies.”

On Feb. 21 al Shabaab militants beheaded two young boys in Somalia because their Christian father refused to divulge information about a church leader, according to Musa Mohammed Yusuf, the 55-year-old father who was living in a Kenyan refugee camp when he spoke with *Compass*.— *Compass*

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The stronger the parallel network of Islamic institutions becomes, the more pressure is exerted on Muslims to use these in preference to non-Muslim institutions. Once a sharia alternative is available, it becomes obligatory for Muslims to obey sharia in that specific case. A serious question is the amount of social, family and community pressure brought to bear on the most vulnerable members of the Muslim community – mainly women and children – to abide by the verdicts of such courts even when they place them at a disadvantage as compared with verdicts achieved in the official British court system. For those living in insular and tightly knit traditional communities, such pressure to conform must be virtually irresistible.

Many Muslim leaders are constantly applying pressure on Western society, institutions and legal systems to adapt as far as possible to Muslim sharia concepts and models, while at the same time constructing their own alternative sharia systems.

Marriage and divorce

Women are undoubtedly the main victims of the sharia system which inherently favors the husband. British law, for instance, recognizes Muslim marriages that were performed abroad before the partners entered the United Kingdom. However, British residents in the United Kingdom must contract marriage according to civil law in order for the marriage to be legally recognized. It is very common, even for well educated Muslims, to think it unnecessary to register their marriages in the civil system. Some wrongly believe that the Islamic wedding ceremony is recognized by British law. In cases of divorce, the women are then left with the much lesser legal rights of a “cohabitee”. Some Muslim men knowingly exploit the ignorance of their wives so as not to have to pay maintenance and repay dowry should they divorce them. Widows may find they lack pension rights and rights to their husband’s property.

Another problem is that many Muslim women may get

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divorced under sharia only, without getting their divorce ratified by a civil court. Some believe they are free to remarry, but under British law they are then committing bigamy (an offense punishable by seven years imprisonment).

Child marriage

In several Muslim countries child marriages are legal. For many traditional Muslims, child marriages are acceptable because Muhammad married his favorite wife Aisha when she was six years old and consummated the marriage when she was nine. This is why, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran's new rulers lowered the minimum age of marriage for girls to nine. Recently in India, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board attempted to gain an exemption for Muslims from the legal minimum marriage age of 18 set by Indian law. According to the board, child marriages are part of sharia which is "absolute, final and non-negotiable".

Even in Britain it is possible that child marriages are happening. The Sharia Council of Darul Uloom London gives some rules for divorce on its website, one of which clearly indicates that the council envisages the possibility of divorcing girls below the age of puberty.

Polygamy

Under sharia a man is allowed up to four wives. Polygamy is allowed in many Muslim countries but prohibited in Western countries. This raises problems for Muslim residents in the West who married another wife either before their immigration or while visiting their "home countries". The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain has complained that many families are being forced to live outside the law because their polygamous marriages are not recognized in the United Kingdom. One estimate gives the number of polygamous families in Britain at several hundred.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation is widespread among some Muslim communities, especially in Egypt, East Africa, Yemen and Indonesia. Some Muslim leaders condemn

it as un-Islamic but many believe that it is ordained in the sharia. They also believe it is essential for preserving women's chastity, on which the all-important family honor largely depends. In 1994 the former Sheik of Al-Azhar, Jad Al-Haqq Ali, ruled that circumcision is an Islamic duty for women as well as for men. In the United Kingdom it is a criminal offense under the 1985 Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act, but an estimated 7,000 girls in Britain are of an age to be at risk from this procedure at any given time. The law is being evaded by families taking the girls abroad for a holiday and having the procedure carried out there.

Veiling

In sharia there are differences between the various schools of law as to the extent of what a woman may reveal in public. The Hanafi and Maliki schools of law permit face and hands to be revealed in public. Thus, there is no need for a veil over the face. Among Hanbalis there are two opinions, some permitting the revealing of face and hands, others forbidding it. The Shafis demand that a woman's face and hands be covered in public, thus demanding some kind of veil over her face. It would seem that the majority of classical scholars agreed that a woman's face may be displayed, and a minority said the face must be covered. Practice thus differed regionally depending on which school of law and scholars were followed in that area.

Both the Quran and Hadith [traditions] urge modesty in women's dress and command them to cover themselves in public. The problem is a matter of interpretation of the original Arabic words used. One such word, *jilbab*, is obviously an outer garment, but what did it look like? Was it just a mantle-like garment that covered the under clothes, or did it cover head and face and ankles as well? Does another word, *jujub*, mean bosom only — or did it mean head, face, neck and bosom?

Some modern Muslim women in the West are adopting the strictest version as a way of asserting their Muslim identity. It appears that Muslim organizations

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in the West are manipulating the issue to further the Islamisation of their host societies. The problem of full veiling of the face for security and anti-terrorist meas-

ures is obvious. Yet in the United States the Council on American-Islamic Relations has managed to persuade the states of Kansas, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Montana and Washington to allow Muslim women to have their driving license photo taken with their faces veiled showing their eyes only.

Halal products

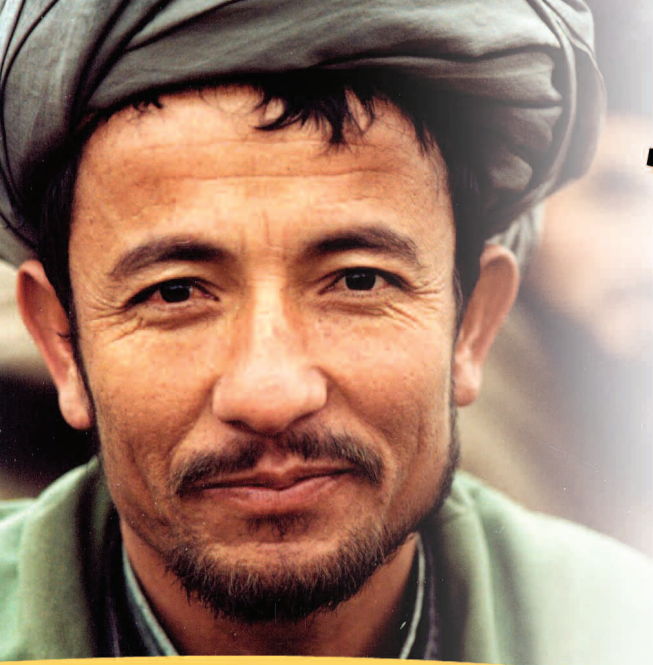
According to sharia, certain food and drinks such as pork and alcohol are forbidden to Muslims. The sharia also says that animals must be slaughtered by Muslims in a religious ritual which includes slitting the animal's throat and draining its blood. Stunning of animals before slaughter is forbidden. Only meat produced by this type of slaughter is halal (permitted) for consumption.

Halal food is provided in many public institutions in the United Kingdom such as schools, hospitals and prisons. Sometimes it is served to everyone, irrespective of faith. Likewise, most of the lamb exported from New Zealand is halal, whether it is going to a Muslim-majority country or to the West.

The Muslim Council of Britain has recommended that the Islamic method of slaughter be adopted universally in Britain for all consumers. This trend can be seen as part of a process of Islamisation, whereby non-Muslims end up living by Islamic rules.

Though the Quran specifically prohibits pork and alcohol, the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America has made a list of 36 different categories of food, drinks, and cosmetic products covering 301 items which meet sharia requirements. Such products must not contain any prohibited ingredients and must be processed according to Islamic guidelines. To protect the certification process from fraud, Muslims in New Jersey, Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, Texas, Virginia and California have successfully persuaded their legislators to adopt a halal bill.

As a result of Intercede's emphasis on Islamic sharia, we hope Christians will be better prepared to act wisely and pray in an informed way.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims
Around the World.*



Friday, January 1, 2010. Please pray

...*for the Muslims of Africa.* With over one billion people on the continent, and 3,500 ethnic groups — the population percentage of Muslims is approximately 45 percent and increasing.

...*for an underground church in Somalia.* An evangelist was killed transporting 25 Bibles in a suitcase. The Muslims that killed him are now searching for the underground church to which the Bibles were destined.

...*for two Iranian MBBs (Muslim Background Believers)* released from prison on bail, still facing the outcome of proselytizing and apostasy charges.

Friday, January 8, 2010. Please pray

...*for churches in Malaysia.* Customs authorities have recently seized 15,000 Bibles because the word “Allah” for God appears in them.

...*for the family of Amina Muse Ali,* 45 years old, a Somali Christian killed after she refused to wear a veil.

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

Friday, January 15, 2010. 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 Muslims of Uzbekistan.* Christian witness is very difficult; the Uzbeki government has made unregistered religious activity a criminal offense. The government has complete control over the definition of religious activity.

...*for the family of a Philippine pastor* who was shot in the head and killed by Muslim radicals.

Friday, January 22, 2010. Please pray

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

...*for the Muslims of Nigeria.* Twelve Nigerian northern states have already enacted sharia law.

...*for God’s Word to reach Muslims in Algeria.* The government continues to persecute Christians and church activity.

Friday, January 29, 2010. Please pray

...*for Christians in Eritrea.* Reports continue to flow out regarding government torture and killing of Christians.

...*for the country of Sudan.* Muslim militants continue to abduct and kill church leaders.

...*for the Muslims of Gansu province in China.* Gansu is home to 1.5 million Muslims, mostly of the Chinese-speaking Hui people.

***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, February 5, 2010. Please pray

...for house churches in the Middle East. Pray that the Lord would continue to watch over these diligent believers.
...for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard by Muslims in Egypt.
...for the people of Kazakhstan. Laws are in place allowing for persecution of Christians. These include worship bans and heavy fines.

Friday, February 12, 2010. Please pray

...for protection of the Church in Nigeria. Violence between Muslims and Christians continues.
...for the country of Pakistan, where extreme violence against Christians continues. Five men were killed recently after refusing to convert to Islam.
...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Muslims. Pray for a genuine move of the Lord through this medium.

Friday, February 19, 2010. Please pray

...for the country of Morocco. No Moroccan church has yet been recognized by the government.
...for Urumqi province in China, home to approximately 10 million Muslims. (Approximately 90 percent are from the Uighur people group.)
...for Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Iran. Persecution continues to be intense as Iranian MBBs face consistent threats of death or imprisonment.

Friday, February 26, 2010. Please pray

...for Christian workers and missionaries in Europe. Pray they would seize opportunities to witness to Muslims that might not otherwise hear about the love of Jesus.
...for believers in Eritrea. 2,000 Christians remain incarcerated, without proper charges or due process.
...for Muslims in the country of Georgia. They number almost 500,000 and have had very little witness of the Gospel since the fall of communism.