

Women in Christianity

Whenever the topic of Islam is brought up among Westerners, it has been my experience that the first objection that immediately springs into their minds is: "But women are so extremely oppressed in Islam." And, "But women are second class citizens in Islam." For example, they see that Muslim women usually observe modest standards in their clothing and they automatically equate their modesty with oppression. They appear to feel that freedom is in some way directly proportional to how little clothing one wears, and that oppression is directly proportional to the degree of modesty one exhibits in their clothing. Although this topic does not directly relate to the main topic of this book, still it seems inevitable to touch on this subject even if only very briefly due to it's importance.

The problem is twofold: First of all, those people who make such objections usually only have a very superficial knowledge of what the true teachings of Islam, and secondly, they do not realize what The Bible requires of all believing women.

Many non-Muslims feel sorry for any Muslim women they see adorned in their modest clothing. They feel that they are deprived the freedom to roam around in more scant and revealing clothing. Anyone who lives in a manner other than which they have become accustomed to is seen by them to be oppressed and forced to live in this manner. There are certain tribes in the Amazon jungle, in Australia, and in Africa which have become accustomed to walking around in a simple g-string around their waist. What would the people of the West say if these people were to condemn the Western habit of "forcing" their women to wear "excessive amounts of clothing" and to demand that all women in the west immediately stop wearing anything but the simplest g-string around their waist? What if they were to say that the Western society should immediately stop unjustly persecuting their women and preventing them from freely roaming the streets wearing only a pair of socks? They would say that the people making these demands have no morals or shame. Philosophers would have a field day with such a question.

What if someone were to claim that it was immoral, discriminatory, and unjust to separate men and women in different public bathrooms just as it is not just to do so with blacks and whites. What if this person were to then call (in the interest of equality, fairness, and constitutional freedom of course) for a merging of men and women's bathrooms into one "unisex" or "equal-opportunity" bathrooms for both men and women? Once again, the philosophers would have a field day. Anyone who follows the news will see that this may indeed be where the USA is now headed. In the *New York Post* (31 Aug. 1994 or a little before) it was reported that women have now won the right to appear topless in the New York subway system. Where will the USA be a few years from now? That is anyone's guess.

Who has the power to determine what is decent and modest clothing? Who is to determine what is decent and modest behavior? Muslims assign this right to God alone. This is the essence of "Islam." "Islam" means "The submission to the will of God." What God commands, a Muslim does. They do not demand that God justify his commands before they accept them. Once they have verified that a command is indeed from God then they abide by it without hesitation.

We can indeed find this lesson in the story of Adam. In the Islamic version of the story of Adam (slightly different than that of Judaism/Christianity), Adam and Eve were created by God, educated, clothed, and then allowed to inhabit heaven. They were told by God that they could have anything their hearts desired except they must not eat from the tree. Out of envy, the devil encouraged them to eat from the tree and told them that it's fruit would make them angels or immortal. They ate from the tree and immediately, their bodies were revealed to one another, so they took to scooping up the leaves off the trees in order to cover themselves. This is when Allah sent them down to earth. What mankind learned from this lesson is that just because a person does not know the wisdom behind a command of God, and others tell him to disobey it, then if they do not abide by it, by the time the reason for the command is made apparent to them it may be too late.



Fig. Example of dress worn by a Christian nun. Compare it with how Muslim women dress today

Well then, what is the Biblical view on these matters? Actually, even in this day and age there still remains traces in Christianity of the common ancestry with Islam with regard to the accepted norms of modest dress for Christian women as ordained by her Creator. In the above figure we have an example of the sort of dress codes observed by Christian nuns. We are strangely amazed to find that it is almost the striking similarity it bears to the sort of outfit which most Muslim women wear. Why is that? Well, although there are quite a number of very pronounced differences between Biblical and Qur'anic laws in this regard, let us start with the Biblical view:

What the New Testament has to say

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."
[1 Timothy 2:11-14]

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." [1 Corinthians 14:33-34]

"But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels." [1 Corinthians 11:5-10]

"Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God (with her head) uncovered?" [1 Corinthians 11:13]

What the Old Testament has to say

"And the man (Adam) said, The woman (Eve) whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." [Genesis 3:12-16]

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a **MALE** child: then she shall be unclean **SEVEN DAYS**; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying **THIRTY THREE** days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled. But if she bear a **FEMALE** child, then she shall be unclean **TWO WEEKS**, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying **SIXTY SIX** days." [Leviticus 12:2-5]

"And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare....while I was still searching but not finding, I found one upright man among a thousand but not one upright woman among them all". [Ecclesiastics 7:26-28]

"And if a woman have an issue (her period/menses), [and] her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And every thing that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe [himself] in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sat upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe [himself] in water, and be unclean until the even. And if it [be] on [her] bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean. And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she [shall be] unclean. Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation. And whosoever toucheth those things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe [himself] in water, and be unclean until the even. But if she be cleansed of her issue, then she shall number to herself seven

days, and after that she shall be clean. And on the eighth day she shall take unto her two turtles, or two young pigeons, and bring them unto the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And the priest shall offer the one [for] a sin offering, and the other [for] a burnt offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her before the LORD for the issue of her uncleanness." [Leviticus 15:19-30]

In other words, the Bible teaches us that:

- 1-Women should learn in silence and subjugation.
- 2-Women should not teach.
- 3-Women should not have authority over men but should remain silent.
- 4-Adam and Eve were not equal in sin. Adam was not deceived but Eve was.
- 5-Women are commanded to be under obedience to men. God ordained that men shall for all time rule over women
- 6-Women must keep silent in Churches. It is shameful for them to open their mouths therein. If they have a question they should ask their husbands before going to church and then their husbands will ask for them in the church.
- 7-A woman should neither pray nor profess with her head uncovered.
- 8-If a woman prays with her head uncovered then she might as well shave her head.
- 9-Man was created in the image and glory of God, and Woman was created in the glory of Man, thus Man must have power

over her.

10-Any woman who delivers a male baby shall be unclean for one week. But any woman who delivers a female baby shall be unclean for TWO weeks. Thus, females make their mothers DOUBLY unclean as compared to males.

11-While it is possible to find one upright man in every thousand, it is impossible to find even one single upright woman in every thousand

12-Woman is a snare, her heart is a trap, and her hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but she will ensnare the sinner.

13-If a woman had her period and touches a chair or a bed or anything else then that item immediately becomes unclean. Anyone who then touches those things shall also become unclean. They must then bathe themselves and wash their clothes because they have touched an item that a menstruous woman has touched.

What the canonized saints of Christianity said about women:

"Woman is a daughter of falsehood, a sentinel of Hell, the enemy of peace; through her Adam lost paradise" (St. John Demascene)

"Woman is the instrument which the devil uses to gain possession of our souls" (St. Cyprian)

"Woman is the fountain of the arm of the devil, her voice is the hissing of the serpent" (St. Anthony)

"Woman has the poison of an asp, the malice of a dragon" (St. Gregory)

St. Tertullian, while he was talking to his 'best beloved sisters' in the faith, he said, "Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the Devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil wasn't valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man."

Once again, St. Augustine wrote to a friend, "What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman."

Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas still considered women as defective, "As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence."

(All these quotations can be found in Karen Armstrong's book, ***The Gospel According to Woman***, London: Elm Tree Books, 1986, pp. 52-62. See also Nancy van Vuuren, ***The Subversion of Women as Practiced by Churches, Witch-Hunters, and Other Sexists*** Philadelphia: Westminster Press pp.28-30.)

Orthodox Jewish men in their daily morning prayer recite "Blessed be God King of the universe that Thou has not made me a woman." The women, on the other hand, thank God every morning for "making me according to Thy will" (Thena Kendath, "Memories of an Orthodox youth" in Susannah Heschel, ed. *On being a Jewish Feminist*, New York: Schocken Books, 1983, pp. 96-97)

According to the Jewish Talmud, "women are exempt from the study of the Torah." In the first century C.E., Rabbi Eliezer said: "If any man teaches his daughter Torah it is as though he taught her lechery" (Leonard J. Swidler, Women in Judaism: the Status of Women in Formative Judaism, Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1976, pp. 83-93)

According to **Rabbi Dr. Menachem M. Brayer** (Professor of Biblical Literature at Yeshiva University) in his book 'The Jewish woman in Rabbinic literature', it was the custom of Jewish women to go out in public with a head covering which, sometimes, even covered the whole face leaving one eye free (Psychosocial Perspective, Hoboken, N.J: Ktav Publishing House, 1986, p. 239). He quotes some famous ancient Rabbis saying, "It is not like the daughters of Israel to walk out with heads uncovered" and "Cursed be the man who lets the hair of his wife be seen....a woman who exposes her hair for self-adornment brings poverty."

Rabbinic law forbids the recitation of blessings or prayers in the presence of a bareheaded married woman since uncovering the woman's hair is considered "nudity" (Ibid., pp. 316-317. Also see Swidler, op. cit., pp. 121-123).

Dr. Brayer also mentions that "During the Tannaitic period the Jewish woman's failure to cover her head was considered an affront to her modesty. When her head was uncovered she might be fined four hundred zuzim for this offense." **Dr. Brayer** also explains that veil of the Jewish woman wasn't always considered a sign of modesty. Sometimes, the veil symbolized a state of distinction and luxury rather than modesty. The veil personified the dignity and superiority of noble women. It, also, represented a woman's inaccessibility as a sanctified possession of her husband (24. Ibid., p. 139). It is clear in the Old Testament that uncovering a woman's head was a great disgrace and that's why the priest had to uncover the suspected adulteress in her trial by ordeal (Numbers 5:16-18).

St. Tertullian in his famous treatise 'On The Veiling Of Virgins' wrote, "Young women, you wear your veils out on the streets, so you should wear them in the church, you wear them when you are among strangers, then wear them among your brothers..." Among the Canon laws of the Catholic church today, there is a law that require women to cover their heads in church (Clara M. Henning, " Canon Law and the Battle of the Sexes" in Rosemary R. Ruether, ed., Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974, p. 272.).

Some Christian denominations, such as the Amish and the Mennonites for example, keep their women veiled to the present day. The reason for the veil, as offered by their Church leaders, is "**The head covering is a symbol of woman's subjection to the man and to God**" : The same logic introduced by St. Paul in the New Testament (Donald B. Kraybill, The riddle of the Amish Culture, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 56.)

Russian Orthodox women are expected to wear a head covering when in the church. Most don't outside of it in America, but many in Russia and many other eastern Orthodox women all over eastern Europe, Greece, and the middle east do wear scarves on their heads all the time when in public.

These are only a small sampling. For many more similar quotations please obtain a copy of the 70 page book "Women in Islam Versus Women in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition: The Myth & The Reality," By Dr. Sherif Abdel Azeem, World Assembly of Muslim Youth.

Continuing, according to the Old Testament, a childless widow must marry her husband's brother, even if he is already married and regardless of her consent, so that she might bear a child from him (Genesis 38).

Further, according to the Bible:

"If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives" [Deuteronomy 22:28-30]

One must ask a simple question here, who is really punished, the man who raped the woman or the woman who was raped? What is to prevent someone from finding the best looking woman in town, raping her, telling everyone about it, and then having the courts force her to be his wife for the rest of her life?

According to Numbers 27:1-11, widows and sisters don't inherit at all. Daughters can inherit only if their deceased father had no sons.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Christianity did not bring a revolutionary social change to the position of women". Indeed, "in the world of the early church, women were held in very low esteem, and this was the basis for divorce practices that put women practically at men's complete disposal".