A Dialogue between a Muslim Man and an American Christian Woman

Part 4

By

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As it looked to Jennifer, Omar was lonesome and fearing to cope with the American society. She knew many female friends who could easily tame this conservative beautiful man. May be if she introduced Omar to one of them, he might remove this false mask of piety and show his true feelings towards women. Woman was the only creature who could easily untie man's complexes and makes his virility flows like a running river.

In one of their sittings before the TV, Jennifer looked straight in Omar's eyes and said, "I have a friend called Christine, she is decent and beautiful, I can introduce you to her if you like. You are a very attractive man and she will be happy to give you company."

A blush spread over Omar's face, he said quickly,

"No thanks, I am fine."

Jennifer said trying to persuade him, "The human being tends to sense a feeling of desolation when finding himself alone and solitary. One feels a longing for someone to share his joys and to keep him company in loneliness."

Omar commented, "The existence of pairs is a universal phenomenon and one of the characteristics of creation. The need of marriage is a necessity for the realization of that human aspect which makes a person human. Sex in Islam means marriage."

Jennifer said annoyed, "Why should two people marry one another especially if the commitment is just as if the two were married? If two people loved each other, then their bond is their love and commitment." Omar said smiling, "What you are saying reminds me with something I read in the Internet yesterday: 'I am Vicky, he is Greg, Greg is my husband, she is Jasmine, she is my friend, Greg is her boyfriend, and I am pregnant. The big problem is that Greg has always said he will not choose between Jasmine and me. He says he loves us both, and he won't leave one for the other, and if we want this thing to end then one or both of us has to leave him, but I

won't do that, and neither will Jasmine. After six days of talking, I think we all realized that this love triangle would not end anytime soon." Jennifer said laughing, "I didn't know that you have a sense of humor. What's wrong with free love? Women worry that they won't be able to find the right guy to marry if they keep themselves so reserved." Omar explained, "Marriage is no longer sacred when women slept with men without commitment. Women's most intimate secret places had been violated. . Woman's purity, the most beautiful thing in her, had so long vanished. Woman is no longer a queen in man's kingdom but a slave. A commodity sold and bought by man. In western societies woman is like a piece of paper torn into shreds by her numerous lovers. Each took away a piece of her purity. The scrap that is left doesn't entice man to marry. Sex without marriage is not a modern lifestyle but clear injustice to woman. Islam neither condemns sexual relations like certain religions, nor does it allow it freely. Islam urges us to control and regulate our desires, so that we remain dignified and not become like animals. Marriage is the only legitimate way to indulge in intimacy between a man and a woman. Our religion considers sex without marriage a clear fornication."

"You look at life from a purely religious perspective. Your thoughts about life are rather old fashioned. I don't think marriage is so important in our contemporary life." Jennifer said quite irritated by Omar's views. However, she found herself willing to hear more.

Omar continued without constraint, "Allah has created men and women as company for one another so that they can procreate and live in peace and tranquility. The Koran says:

And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Undoubtedly in these are signs for those who reflect (30:21).

And Allah has made for you your mates of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best (16:72).

These verses of the Noble Koran clearly show that in contrast to other religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism etc. which consider celibacy or monasticism as a great virtue and a means of salvation, Islam considers marriage as one of the most virtuous and approved institutions. The Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) declared, *"There is no monasticism in Islam."* He further ordained,

"O you young men! Whoever is able to marry should marry, for that will help him to lower his gaze and guard his modesty." (Al-Bukhari).

The Prophet regarded modesty as a great virtue. He said, "Modesty is part of faith." (Al-Bukhari).

The importance of the institution of marriage receives its greatest emphasis from the following narration of the Prophet:

"Marriage is my sunna (tradition). Whosoever keeps away from it is not from me."

It is narrated that the Messenger of Allah said,

When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half."

The Prophet considered marriage for a Muslim as half of his religion because it shields him from promiscuity, adultery, fornication, homosexuality etc., which ultimately lead to many other evils like slander, quarreling, homicide, loss of property and disintegration of the family. According to the Prophet the remaining half of the faith can be saved by piety.

In a beautiful tradition the Prophet has given the most important point that should be considered by every Muslim when selecting his bride:

"Whoever marries a woman solely for her power and position, Allah will only increase him in humiliation. Whoever marries a woman solely for her wealth, Allah will only increase him in poverty. Whoever marries a woman because of her beauty, Allah will only increase him in ugliness. But whoever marries a woman in order that he may restrain his eyes, observes cautiousness, and treat his relations kindly, Allah puts a blessing in her for him and in him for her."

The Prophet is reported to have said that a woman is ordinarily sought as wife for her wealth, for her beauty, for the nobility of her stock, or for her religious qualities; but blessed and fortunate is he who chooses his mate for piety in preference to everything else. When the Prophet was asked what the best thing to be treasured was, he replied:

"The tongue in remembrance of Allah, the heart filled with thanks to Allah, and a pious wife who helps in virtuous deeds."

In another narration the Prophet said:

"The best thing to be treasured is the devoted wife who causes pleasure when seen, obeys orders instantly and takes full care of herself and her husband's property when he is away."

This implies that women should be chosen on the basis of high morals, religious devotion, and not merely on her attractiveness or other mundane wealth.

The consent of both the man and the woman is an essential element of marriage, and the Koran gives women a substantial role in choosing their own life partners:

Do not prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree between themselves in a lawful manner. (2: 232).

So as you see Jennifer, beauty and wealth are but superficial, but the beauty of faith is transcendent."

Jennifer, "What you are saying is purely ideal but reality is different. Marriage is always sacred to woman, but how could you live a happy marriage in such restless world! Women and men now prefer to live together an easy life without commitment. In your view those who are living this kind of lifestyle are sinful and deserve Allah's wrath. I can understand that because adultery is forbidden in all religions."

Omar, "Marriage is the foundation of civilization. It is an undertaking of great obligation dissolved in the delight of sexual allurement and enjoyment. Marriage is mentioned in the Koran with honor as a tradition of the Prophets.

"Indeed, We sent messengers before you, and gave them wives and children." (13, 38).

It is the obligation of the individual and of the generation towards coming generations that they are reared righteously and afforded proper upbringing

and education. And where can this proper upbringing and morality be achieved other than under the shade of marriage and stable family life? Allah describes the believers as being "merciful among themselves", and the Prophet has said, "The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, mercy and compassion is the likeness of a body." How is this love and mercy going to develop in the community if not by its starting out in the building block of society, the family?

"And of His Signs is that He has created for you from your own selves, mates that you might incline to them (with love, companionship, intimacy, etc.) and He has placed between you love and mercy." (30, 21).

This love and mercy will be picked up by children, and from this family unit and others like it, it extends to the surrounding community, until it permeates the entire society, such that they truly display the characteristic of the believers "*Merciful amongst themselves*." So, marriage is the naturally correct way and the proper path for extending civilization by such human procreation as allows for inhabitation of the earth, construction of civilization and furthering the religion of Allah.

Here in America, at the age of 15 boys and girls leave their parents and live together. They move from one to the other during the course of their lives until marriage became unimportant. Women and men move to live together without obligation fearing the consequences of marriage followed by divorce. If kids are born, they are bastards facing disgrace and disgust from the society. The explanation is "it's a free country." Freedom has its borders and limitations. Women have the right to live decently in their homes with their devoted husbands and kids. Here they become ladies as Allah wished them to be; otherwise they will become a commodity treated in a disgraceful manner."

"It is strange that your opinion of American morals is so low." Jennifer objected. She then continued,

"I knew of 15 year olds who behaved like this, moving in with someone, but this is not a normal thing at all. The behavior usually begins in college or at least after the high school years, and it is limited to people in the lower social classes, or to young adults who think they are in love. Adults tend to live together a while ounce they are engaged to be married, but most repeatedly marry than moving in and out with partners they are not married to.

Abortion is an often-prescribed course of action if the college age woman becomes pregnant. I must admit that there is a terribly high rate of unmarried college young girls having babies. These girls do not live with their boyfriends; they usually live with their families. These children are not treated badly by society; it is not much of a problem for them at all. It is acceptable for these young girls to be having children, and often day care centers are set up at the high schools. Really, neither the young mothers nor the children face any societal backlash these days. I must say that this is a generation problem. In other words, the mothers of these young mothers themselves were not married when they became pregnant. As I say, there is a cultural subgroup where this is perfectly okay. Other students in the same school would never get themselves into such a situation, they know how it could limit the possibilities in their life. What we could do with these babies having babies was to teach them parenting skills. We tried to teach sexual abstinence in the high schools, but sometimes the behaviors started years earlier than we were allowed to talk to.

Your words, "the right of women to live decently in their homes with their devoted husbands and kids" are beautiful. I just don't know if I can believe this right is unmolested in any culture. There is always evil coming against good, correct?"

"Women in Islam got all the rights women hope to get. She is the queen of the family, half the society, has the right to marry, divorce, work, inherit, keep her family name after marriage, work as judge, minister, fight battles with men etc. Again, sex in our religion means marriage and no sex without marriage." Omar said hoping to end the discussion.

Jennifer shouted disapprovingly, "This is the part where you will have to forgive me for being blunt, and you may become irritated or even angry. You have to be patient with me when you don't like what I am saying. This you describe is a perfect world, a utopia. Does it exist really? We understand a woman is allowed those rights only if her husband or father if unmarried, consents-true or not? And if a woman has sex outside of marriage, her family or the government can murder her in the cruelest ways, but for the man there is no punishment-true or not? So, if the woman behaves herself exactly as the husband dictates, she will be allowed these many things, but they can be taken away at any time that the husband decides-true or not? Christianity also has the perfect world for women. To be loved and protected by a man, who loves her as Christ, God, loves him. But in the real world, most men professing such a thing actually believe they are the God, with complete control over the woman, and it is a very bad situation. It is words followed as instruction without the spiritual knowledge and love necessary to make it true.

I am interested in the Middle Eastern world and the differences between countries and cultures, and subgroups beyond that. Most of us lump all Middle Eastern cultures together, so that even what the Taliban does, we think all Muslims do. That is outrageous to you I am sure, but it is how most of us think. We learn of Muslim women who are treated so horribly by their husbands and brothers that we cannot even speak of it again. We are told these things are legal and expected. Such things are women being stoned to death because they had sexual relations outside of marriage, while the married man they had the relations with is free and unharmed. A brother defending the family's honor by murdering his sister, when the sister had been raped. We meet Middle Eastern men here in America who are free to roam and use of the decadence they can find here, while keeping their wives in the home country oblivious to what the husband is doing. Or if their wives are here with them, they are still covered up, while their husbands wear normal American clothes and are free to look at all the American females who are not covered, free to socialize with women as well as men. We understand that a Muslim woman is not allowed to seek medical treatment for herself, especially surgery, without the written consent of her husband. Also, that she is not free to travel without the written consent of her husband. Actually we understand that if a Muslim woman is told not to breathe by her husband, she will cease breathing. And why do they act this way, we wonder? We think they must be so terrified of the consequences that they always obey, like a mistreated animal."

Don't hold your mouth open. I am being honest with you, even as late as five years ago, I probably would have been afraid to have a conversation with you, a Muslim man. Also when I was in university, some officers from the U.S. marines visited our class one day. We were discussing women in the military. At the time, I was very much for any woman who wanted to serve as a man, to be able to do so. These officers instilled a fear in me that I carried for years and am dealing with even now. They told me what might happen to a woman captured by a Middle Eastern enemy. The vision they gave me haunts me still. They told the whole class that women were nothing to Muslim men, "less than the dirt under a snake's belly" is exactly the phrase they used. They said women would have to go into combat equipped with several types of suicide devices, because once in the hands of the Muslim men, they would die a thousand, horrible, indescribable deaths. Perhaps these officers knew only about such factions and perhaps they did not have enough information to know there were different groups of Muslim people, not all the same, that there are extremists in every religion. But these men believed what they were saying completely, and since they were

officers in the U.S., we did not doubt them. Only recently have I heard different things about the Muslim religion."

In my earlier personal experiences, I have encountered Middle Eastern men in real social clubs, dancing, socializing clubs, whose behavior was just disgusting. They were lecherous, gross, just nasty and I hated them. Perhaps these men are from a Muslim culture, but really do not hold the beliefs. I would have no way of knowing how or what they are, except what they look like. Frequently, Middle Eastern men will court and marry an American woman, only for the American to find out the man has a wife or two in his home country already, perhaps an arranged marriage. He assumes that as long as no one finds out, there is no problem. Also, I have known personally American women who married Middle Eastern men and then find out that the men were interested only in the green card, to get a job in America. Once they had the green card, they brought over their girlfriends or wives from their home country, and left the American woman. I would like to add here also that Muslims practice polygamy, a matter that is totally rejected by the Christians and the westerners in general. Hearing or reading the word "polygamy" cause our bodies to react physically. The face cringes, the stomach turns and shivers run throughout our body. Unlike most words this word assumes the role of an enemy. I also heard that Muslim women have no right to inherit her parents or her deceased husband.

When I was in the university, Muslim girls were very studious, very sweet, they held to their principles and beliefs entirely while here. There were some male students like that too, but more frequently, the male students lose their religion, stop praying, eat things and drink things, and do things strictly forbidden by their religion, take up the partying lifestyle, date loose American girls and women etc. and then still return to their home country as if they had been faithful the whole time.

So, we cannot see any benefit to being a Muslim woman. Of course, there are hardships for women everywhere, but the U.S. perspective is that it is a particularly bad thing to be a Muslim woman.

Now take a break and remind yourself that you asked for honesty and promised toleration. Don't be mad at me Omar, You asked for this."

"I appreciate your honesty and frankness. Honesty is the nearest road to the truth. I'll try to answer your questions and clarify misconceptions, but bear in mind that understanding a certain religion from the attitude of some of its nominal followers is misleading. Many people confuse culture with religion, many others do not know what their religious books are saying, and many

others do not even care. We should distinguish between real Islamic belief and varied Muslim practices influenced by culture and social customs. I will begin my explanation by asking few questions: Do Judaism and Christianity truly offer women a better treatment than Islam does? The literal meaning of Islam is peace; surrender one's face to Allah, surrendering one's own pleasure for the pleasure of Allah. The message of Islam was revealed to the Prophet Mohamed peace and blessings on him, more than 1,400 years ago. It was revealed through angel Gabriel and was thus preserved in the Holy Koran. Indeed the Koran caused ignorance and corruption to vanish and gave way to reasoning and justice, to intellect and integrity. It carries a divine guarantee of safeguard from interpolation and it combines the best features of the earlier scriptures. That's why it stood the test of time and stood like a monument for over fourteen centuries and shall remain distinguished and conspicuous until the Day of Judgment. Islam is based on three primary provisions: unconditioned recognition of Allah and the faithful belief in Him and His messenger Mohamed, acknowledgement of the truth of resurrection and judgment, and deeds must be crowned with wisdom and piety, and that all must go together. The prime message of Islam is the unity of Allah, that the Creator of the world is one and He alone is worthy of worship and that Mohamed is His Messenger and servant.

Islam believes that each person is born pure. Allah has given human beings a choice between good and evil and to seek Allah's pleasure through faith, prayer and charity. The Holy Koran tells us that Muslims must believe in Allah's angels, previously revealed Books of Allah, all the Prophets from Adam to Jesus-peace be on them all- the Day of Judgment and indeed the Decree of Allah. Islam's main message is to worship Allah and to treat all Allah's creation with kindness and compassion. Rights of parents in old age, orphans and the needy are clearly stated. Women's rights were safeguarded more than 1,400 years ago when the rest of the world was in total darkness about emancipation.

In Islam virtue does not connote forsaking the bounties of nature that are lawful. On the contrary one is encouraged to lead a healthy, active life with the qualities of kindness, chastity, honesty, mercy, courage, patience and politeness. Islam has a perfect and complete code for the guidance of the individuals and communities alike. As the entire message of Islam is derived from the Holy Koran and the traditions and practices of the Prophet Mohamed, it is immutable in the face of change in time and place. It may appear rigid to the casual eye, in reality it is most certainly an adaptable way of life regardless of human changes. At present there are 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide and they form the majority in more than 50 countries of the world. Today Islam is the fastest growing faith in the world. Its beautiful message is reaching millions in the far corner of the earth.

The Muslim world is not united and is not properly developed. It is either ruled by a king or a leader who rules for life. There is no true democracy and people in most cases are prevented from expressing their views. The general atmosphere is conservative due to Islamic instructions. The instructions are taken either lightly and in a cognitive way, or are taken in a rather oldfashioned staid image of religion. This depends upon the level of cultural and society development.

Islam prohibits fornication, theft, wine, murder, gambling, usury, pig meat, hypocrisy, lesbianism, and urged women to hide the sexy parts of their bodies except for their husbands and fathers.

Muslim youth coming from such conservative culture to an open society where religion is separated from the state and all sorts of temptation are legally allowed might deviate from the right path. Unreligious Muslims or Muslims by birth only might follow the same. Others might go after their own interest by marrying an American woman to get the green card. It should be pointed out here that the open social life of the U.S. encourages them to do so. To them, America is the land where no restriction is put on man's behavior. It's an open society where every temptation is allowed. So the fault lies primarily on the loose country that allows the new comers to take advantage of the decadence prevailing in its society. A sort of society reform is needed here.

Intuitively, Islam as a religion has nothing to do with the deviations you have just mentioned. Would I judge Christianity according to the behavior of Christian homosexuals, priests sexually abusing children and women in churches, preaching Christianity with dancing and singing, buying Allah's consent by passing a collection bucket, lesbian preachers, open sex in the movies made by Christian actors and actresses, Christian drunkards and gamblers, Christian men and women living together without marriage, pregnant girls seeking abortion thus killing a soul without right. Christianity and Islam do not allow any of such abnormalities. Christianity is a great religion, and it has been mentioned in the Koran.

Now let me clarify some of the misconceptions you raised about Muslim women.

You said, "We understand a woman is allowed those rights only if her husband consents."

She is allowed those divine rights whether her husband consent or not,

otherwise she will sue him in court and may divorce him because by depriving her from her Islamic rights the court will consider him as a sinner. This takes us to the position of women in Islam. I wish you could have read a booklet entitled "Women in Islam Versus Judaeo-Christian Tradition: The Myth and The Reality" The booklet is written by the author Sherif Mohammed. He is an eminent writer and thinker with an academic background in electrical engineering. The booklet is a must for those who are interested in knowing the position of women in Islam in comparison with the status of women in the other two religions Judaism and Christianity. Islam teaches that the woman is not inherently inferior to man; rather man and woman are of similar nature. They both are equal in intellectual and spiritual capacity. Furthermore they are equally responsible for their deeds before Allah.

In Islam woman has a primary role to play in the constitution and running of the family. Such is the importance of the role of motherhood that Prophet Mohamed informed us that paradise lies under the feet of the mother. In other words one must respect, honor and be good to one's mother. If you visit a Muslim home it will become very noticeable how the entire family pivots around her and it is extremely rare in Muslim countries to hear of a mother or father being farmed off into a nursing home when they are elderly. Islam places great emphasis on the role of the Muslim woman as a wife and particularly as a mother. Muslims are often of the opinion that the best position of the woman is in the home with her children and family. However, the Muslim woman is not prohibited from leaving her home to pursue education, a career or other worthwhile goals that profit not only her but society as well. The Koran establishes the spiritual equality and mutual responsibility of man in verses such as the following:

"But whosoever does good works of righteousness, whether they be a believing male or female, shall enter Paradise, and not be wronged a pit mark of a date stone." (4, 124).

"And indeed their Lord answered them, "I do not waste the labors among you, male or female, you are from each other." (3, 195).

A husband is commanded by the law of Allah to treat his wife with equity, respect her feelings and show kindness and consideration. He not only should avoid hurting her but also should bear with her if she ever does something disagreeable, so long as this clemency does not spoil her and she does not habitually behave out of bounds. The Koran reads:

"...and treat them (women) kindly." (4, 19).

The Prophet said,

'Fear Allah, fear Allah in the matter of women. They are weak partners, a trust from Allah with you, and they are made by the divine word permissible for you."

He also said,

"Whoever of you whose wife behaves in a disagreeable manner and he responds by kindness and patience, Allah will give him rewards as much as Job will be given for his patience."

Also, the Prophet last sermon stresses kindness to women.

The relationship of the Muslim husband to his wife is not that of master to slave. Rather the entire responsibility of economic support is placed on the shoulders of the husband alone. The Muslim husband is responsible for the protection, happiness and maintenance of his wife. He is responsible for the cost of her food, clothes and accommodation. He cannot demand of his wife that she also become economically productive to support the family, although she is able to do this if she desires. The Koran explains this responsibility of men to women in the following verse:

"Men are the maintainers of women for that Allah has preferred in bounty one of them over the other, and for that they have spent their wealth. Righteous women are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded." (4, 34).

One of the main duties of the wife is to contribute to the success and blissfulness of the marriage. The wife must be faithful, trustworthy and honest. She must not allow any other person to have access to that which is exclusively the husband right i.e. sexual intimacy. She must not receive or entertain strange males in the house without his knowledge and consent. She should not be alone with a strange male. She should not accept gifts from other men without his approval. This is meant to avoid jealousy, suspicion and gossip. The husband possessions are her trust. She may not dispose of his belongings without his permission. A wife should make herself sexually attractive to her husband and be responsive to his advances. The wife must not refuse her husband sexually as this can lead to marital problems and worse still-tempt the man to adultery. The angels curse women who refuse their husbands, for this is one of the wife's most important roles. The Prophet said:

"A wife must run to her husband if he calls her, even if she is occupied at the oven."

The purpose of obedience in the relationship is to keep the family unit running as smoothly as possible. The man has been given the right to be obeyed because he is the leader and not because he is superior. Obedience does not mean blind obedience, it is subject to conditions. The wife must accept that if there is a dispute between her and her husband, he has the final word. In other words, she must accept his leadership. Authority is not the equivalent to power, much less absolute power, so men should not consider their position as one of power and the woman's as subservience or submission. The office of leadership is not founded for the man. It is allocated to him and he is appointed to it because he is better qualified for the position. The man as part of the family unit is bound by the rule of the office. He is answerable to Allah at all times so he is not given free reign to rule as he pleases. His leadership is not unquestionable. If he does something unethical the wife is entitled to tell her husband that his behavior is unacceptable in Islam. The rights and obligations of each of the sexes are complementary. These rights and obligations are set out to give the marital relationship the best chance of success and survival. It is Allah who knows what is best for his creation. If we have true faith we will accept Allah's law so that we can prosper in this life and in the next. The important point that should be made is that the religion of Islam has great respect for the woman. It does not teach that she is without a soul or that she is the root of all evil, neither does it define a woman as being inferior and must be kept in seclusion and subjugation. Both Judaism and Christianity preach that the fall of Adam from the Garden of Eden was the fault of Eve and as such women are to blame. This is not the teaching of Islam; the Koran directs all the responsibility to Adam himself, while adding that Allah turned to Adam in mercy and forgave him his sin. Therefore, Adam's sin stops with Adam himself, and Allah does not hold mankind responsible for the sin of Adam and rejects the concept of original sin.

We are often asked why Muslim women are covered. The attire of a Muslim woman is that of modesty, where her figure is not apparent for outsiders and her head is covered with a scarf. In the present days where rape is a common occurrence in the west she finds modest clothing to be a protection from unwarranted advances by the opposite sex.

The West considers the veil as the greatest symbol of women's oppression and servitude. Is it true that there is no such thing as the veil in the Judea-Christian tradition?

According to Rabbi Dr. Menachem Bayer, Professor of Biblical Literature at Yeshiva University, in his book, "The Jewish woman in rabbinical 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 only the eyes free. He quotes some famous ancient Rabbis saying: "It is not like daughters of Israel to walk out with heads uncovered," and, "cursed be the man who lets the hair of his wife seen…a woman who exposes her hair for self-adornment brings poverty."

Rabbinical 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. Dr. Bayer 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, Bayer also explains that veil of the Jewish woman was not 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.

The veil signified a woman's self-respect and social status. Women of lower classes would often wear the veil to give the impression of a higher standing. The fact that the veil was the sign of nobility was the reason why prostitutes were not permitted to cover their hair in the old Jewish society. However, prostitutes often wore a special headscarf in order to look respectable. Jewish women in Europe continued to wear veils until the nineteenth century when their lives became more intermingled with the surrounding secular culture. The external pressures of the European life in the nineteenth century forced many of them to go out bareheaded. Some Jewish women found it more convenient to replace their traditional veil with a wig as another form of hair covering. Today, most pious Jewish women do not cover their hair except in the synagogue. Some of them, such as the Hasidic sects, still use the wig.

What about the Christian tradition? It is well known that Catholic nuns have been covering their heads for hundreds of years, but that is not all. St. Paul in the New Testament made some very interesting statements about the veil: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is Allah. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head. It is just as though her head was shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her head cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought to not cover his head, since he is the image and glory of Allah; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head."

Among the Canon laws of the Catholic Church today, there is a law that requires women to cover their heads in church. Some Christian denominations such as the Amish and the Mennonites keep their women veiled to the present day. The reason for the veil, as offered by their Church leaders is that "The head covering is a symbol of woman's subjection to the man and to Allah," which is the same logic introduced by St. Paul in the New Testament.

Thus, the only purpose of the veil in Islam is protection. The Islamic veil, unlike the veil of the Christian tradition is not a sign of man's authority over woman nor is it a sign of woman's subjection to man. The Islamic veil, unlike the veil in the Jewish tradition, is not a sign of luxury and distinction of some noble married women. The Islamic veil is only a sign of modesty with the purpose of protecting women, all women. The Islamic philosophy is that it is always better to be safe than sorry. In fact, the Koran is so concerned with protecting women's bodies and women's reputation that a man who dares to falsely accuse a woman of unchastely will be severely punished:

"And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations) flog them with eighty stripes; and reject their evidence ever after; for such men are wicked transgressors." (24, 4). Compare this strict Koranic attitude with the extremely lax punishment for rape in 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." (Deut. 22:28-30).

One must ask a simple question here, who is really punished? The man who only paid a fine for rape, or the girl who is forced to marry the man who raped her and lives with him until he dies? Another question that also should be asked: which is more protective to women, the Koranic strict attitude or the Biblical lax attitude?

Some people, especially in the West, would tend to ridicule the whole argument of modesty for protection. Their argument is that the best protection is the spread of education, civilized behavior, and self-restraint. We would say: fine but not enough. If civilization is enough protection, then why is it that women in North America dare not walk alone in a dark street or even across an empty parking lot? If education is the solution, then why is it that a respected university like Queen's has a walk home service mainly for female students on campus? If self restraint is the answer, then why are cases of sexual harassment in the workplace reported on the news media every day? A sample of those accused of sexual harassment, in the last few years, includes: navy officers, managers, university professors, Senators, Supreme Court justices and the President of the United States! Something is fundamentally wrong in the society you live in. A radical change in the society's life style and culture is absolutely necessary. A culture of modesty is badly needed, modesty in dress, in speech, and in manners of both men and women. A society, which expels young women from schools because of their modest dress, is simply harming itself. It is one of the great ironies of our world today that the very same headscarf revered as a sign of holiness when worn by catholic nuns for the purpose of showing the authority of man, is reviled as a sign of oppression when worn for the purpose of protection by Muslim women.

I must say that social disorder has been transported to us from Western society, which has falsely labeled it as "personal freedom." It is that disorder which condones people remaining unmarried, not raising families, roaming around causing corruption, fulfilling their lusts in vile and base manners. It is the disorder of a society, which progressively regresses, licensing ever more lewd and unnatural behavior. I am afraid Muslims are under attack. Not only under physical attack and persecution in various parts of the world, but also an ideological assault. We are being subjected to attacks on our morality. The enemies of truth seek to corrupt the morals, values and virtues of people in general and Muslims in particular. Various phenomena which are nowadays commonplace: movies peddling nudity and lust, styles of clothing and fashions which reveal ever more of the nudity, pornographic and semi-pornographic magazines; are all part of the conspiracy and onslaught.

"And they work corruption in the land. And Allah does not love those who work corruption." (5, 64).

In the Koran the sin of adultery is mentioned alongside polytheism and murder, illustrating its seriousness.

"The servants of Allah are those who do not call upon another Allah besides Allah, nor kill the soul which Allah has made sacred, except with just cause, nor commit fornication. And, whoever does that will meet punishment. The chastisement will be doubled for him on the day of arising, and he shall abide therein in ignominy. (Al-Forqan, 68-69).

The Prophet Mohamed also said, "The fornicator is not a believer while he commits fornication." (Bukhari, Muslim).

The Prophet also said, "His belief leaves his body while he commits the shameful act, and hovers outside it until he finishes the act, at which time he regains it."

There is a severe sentence for fornicators and adulterers in an Islamic state once the crime has been proven by either the testimony of four witnesses, or by confession. The physical punishment they receive is painful indeed, 100 lashes if never married, or stoning to death if the guilty has consummated a legitimate marriage at any time in the past. There is also a psychological element to the punishment.

"Let not any pity overcome you (so as to prevent you) from inflicting the order of Allah, if indeed you believe in Allah and the last day. And, let a group of the believers witness their punishment." (24, 2).

Furthermore, the fornicator is not allowed to consummate a marriage thereafter with a chaste partner. And there is punishment in the Hereafter. Islam has not only forbidden adultery and fornication, but has accompanied this prohibition with legislation that seals the avenues to them. Anything which is a precursor of fornication is itself a minor form of fornication. As in the authentic narration, "*The eyes commit fornication, and their fornication is the look.*"

Among those things which Islam has prohibited in this light are:

Entering houses without permission:

"O you who believe! Do not enter houses other than your (own) houses until you have asked permission from and greeted its occupants." (24, 27).

Lowering the gaze

"Tell the believing men to lower their gazes and protect their private parts; that is purer for them; indeed Allah is well aware of what they do. And, tell the believing women to lower their gazes, and to protect their private parts, and to not reveal their beauty except that of it which is apparent." (24, 30-31).

Covering the private parts

"O Prophet! Tell your wives, your daughters and the believing women to draw their cloaks (veils) over their bodies (when outdoors). That is most convenient that they could be known as such (i.e. decent and chaste) and not molested." (33, 59).

Outwardly in the modern world, women are thought to have equal rights in education, work, and so forth, but in reality women are still oppressed in a different more subtle way. In order to socialize they have to dress in a dissolute way to appear more appealing to men. In these days of the socalled "society of equal rights" girls are expected to have a boyfriend and lose their virginity in order not to be weird! This is a sort of oppression even though women do not realize it. In the majority of cases women are attacked and molested because of how they are dressed. Islam does not oppress women, but rather liberates them and gives them the respect they deserve. Islam is the religion Allah has chosen for the whole of mankind. Those who accept it are truly liberated from the chains and shackle of mankind whose ruling and legislating necessitates nothing but the oppression of one group by another and the exploitation of one sex by the other. This is not the case in Islam, which truly liberated women and gave them individuality not given by any other authority."

You said, "Muslims practice polygamy, a matter that is totally rejected by the Christians and the westerners in general..."

Mankind has practiced polygamy for thousands of years. Many of the ancient Israelites were polygamous, some having hundreds of wives. King Solomon is said to have had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. David had ninety-nine and Jacob had four. No early society put any restrictions on the number of wives or put any conditions about how they were to be treated. Jesus was not known to have spoken against polygamy. As recently as the seventeenth century, polygamy was practiced and accepted in the Christian Church. The Mormons-Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day saints- has allowed and practiced polygamy in the United States.

Monogamy was introduced into Christianity at the time of Paul when many revisions took place in Christianity. This was done in order for the church to conform to the Greco-Roman culture where men were monogamous but owned many slaves who were free for them to use; in other words, unrestricted polygamy.

Early Christians invented ideas that women were "full of sin" and man was better off to "never marry." Since this will be the end of mankind these same people compromised and said, "Marry only one."

In the American society many times when relations are strained, the husband simply deserts his wife. Then he cohabits with other immoral woman without marriage. Actually there are three kinds of polygamy practiced in western societies:

Serial polygamy. That is, marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce and so on any number of times;

A man married to one woman but having and supporting one or more mistresses;

an unmarried man having a number of mistresses.

Islam condones but discourages the first and forbids the other two. Wars cause the number of women to greatly exceed the number of men. In a monogamous society these women, left without husbands or support, resort to prostitution, illicit relationships with married men resulting in illegitimate children with no responsibility on the part of the father, or lonely spinsterhood or widowhood.

Some western men take the position that monogamy protects the rights of women. But are these men really concerned about the rights of women? The society has so many practices, which exploit and suppress women, leading to women's liberation movements from the suffragettes of the early twentieth century to the feminists of today.

The truth of the matter is that monogamy protects men - allowing them to play around without responsibility. Easy birth control and easy legal abortion has opened the door of illicit sex to woman and she has been lured into the so-called sexual revolution. But she is still the one who suffers the trauma of abortion and the side effects of the birth control methods. Taking aside the plagues of venereal disease, herpes and AIDS, the male continue to enjoy himself free of worry.

Men are the ones protected by monogamy while women continue to be victims of men's desires. Polygamy is very much opposed by the male dominated society because it would force men to face up to responsibility and fidelity. It would force them to take responsibility for their polygamous inclinations and would protect and provide for women and children. Among all the polygamous societies in history there were none, which limited the number of wives. All of the relations were unrestricted. In Islam, the regulations concerning polygamy limit the number of wives a man can have while making him responsible for all the women involved.

"Marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with them, then only one or one that your right hand possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice." (4, 3).

This verse from the Koran allows a man to marry more than one woman but only if he can deal justly with them. Another verse says that a person is unable to deal justly between wives, thus giving permission but discouraging.

"You will never be able to deal justly between wives however much you desire (to do so). But (if you have more than one wife) do not turn altogether away (from one), leaving her in suspense.." (4, 129).

While the provision of polygamy makes the social system flexible enough to deal with all kinds of conditions, it is not necessarily recommended or

preferred by Islam. Taking the example of the Prophet is instructive. He was married to one woman, Khadijah, for 25 years. It was only after her death when he had reached the age of fifty that he entered into other marriages to promote friendships, create alliances or to be an example of some lessons to the community; also to show the Muslims how to treat their spouses under different conditions of life.

The Prophet was given inspiration from Allah about how to deal with multiple marriages and the difficulties encountered therein. It is not an easy matter for man to handle two wives, two families, and two households and still be just between the two. No man of reasonable intelligence would enter into this situation without a great deal of thought and very compelling reasons.

In most human societies, females outnumber males. In the U.S. there are at least eight million more women than men. In a country like Guinea there are 122 females for every 100 males. In Tanzania, there are 95.1 males per 100 females. What should a society do towards such unbalanced sex ratios? There are various solutions, some might suggest celibacy, others would prefer female infanticide, which does happen in some societies in the world today! Others may think the only outlet is that the society should tolerate all manners of sexual permissiveness: prostitution, sex out of wedlock, homosexuality, etc.

For other societies, like most African societies today the most honorable outlet is to allow polygamous marriage as a culturally accepted and socially respected institution.

Polygamy in most African societies is such a respectable institution that some Protestant churches are becoming more tolerant of it. A bishop of the Anglican Church in Kenya declared that, "Although monogamy may be ideal for the expression of love between husband and wife, the church should consider that in certain cultures polygamy is socially acceptable and that the belief that polygamy is contrary to Christianity is no longer tenable." After a careful study of African polygamy, Reverend David Gitari of the Anglican Church has concluded that polygamy, as ideally practiced, is more Christian than divorce and remarriage as far as the abandoned wives and children are concerned.

It should be noted that in many Muslim societies today the practice of polygamy is rare since the gap between the number of both sexes is not huge. One can safely say that the rate of polygamous marriages in the Muslim world is much less than the rate of extramarital affairs in the West. In other words men in the Muslim world today are far more strictly monogamous than men in the western world. It has to be added that polygamy in Islam is a matter of mutual consent. No one could force a woman to marry a married man. Besides, the wife has the right to stipulate that her husband must not marry any other woman as a second wife. The Bible on the other hand, sometimes resorts to forcible polygamy. A childless widow must marry her husband's brother, even if he is already married regardless of her consent (Genesis 38:8-10).

Billy Graham, the eminent Christian evangelist has recognized this fact: "Christianity cannot compromise on the question of polygamy. If presentday Christianity cannot do so, it is to its own detriment. Islam has permitted polygamy as a solution to social ills and has allowed a certain degree of latitude to human nature but only within the strictly defined framework of the law. Christian countries make a great show of monogamy, but actually they practice polygamy. No one is aware of the part mistresses play in western society. In this respect Islam is a fundamentally honest religion, and permits a Muslim to marry a second wife if he must, but strictly forbids all clandestine amatory associations in order to safeguard the moral probity of the community."

Philip Kilbride, an American anthropologist of Roman Catholic heritage, in his provocative book, "Plural marriage of our time" proposes polygamy as a solution to some of the ills of the American society. He argues that plural marriage may serve as a potential alternative for divorce in many cases in order to obviate the damaging impact of divorce on many children. He maintains that many divorces are caused by the rampant extramarital affairs in the American society. According to Kilbride, ending extramarital affairs in a polygamous marriage, rather than a divorce, is better for the children. He thinks that children will be better served if family augmentation rather than only separation and dissolution were seen as options. He also suggested that other groups would also benefit from plural marriage such as elderly women who face a chronic shortage of men and the African Americans who are involved in man sharing.

The world today possesses more weapons of mass destruction than ever before and the European churches might sooner or later, be obliged to accept polygamy as the only way out. Father Hillman has thoughtfully recognized this fact:

"It is quite conceivable that these genocidal techniques (nuclear, biological, chemical...) could produce so drastic an imbalance among the sexes that plural marriage would become necessary means of survival...Then contrary to previous custom and law, an overriding natural and moral inclination might arise in favor of polygamy. In such a situation, theologians and church

leaders would quickly produce weighty reasons and biblical texts to justify a new conception of marriage."

What is more dignifying to a woman? An accepted and respected second wife as in the Islamic approach or a virtual prostitute as in the 'civilized' allies approaches? In other words, what is more dignifying to a woman, the Koranic prescription or the theology based on the culture of the Roman Empire?

I would like to add here that the Western media is biased against Islam and Muslims.

There are two unique factors that managed to produce strong and sustained bias against Islam and Muslims.

First, in the Middle Ages Islam presented a major challenge to Christian Europe in terms of power, science and culture. Europe reacted to this challenge with hate. Much of this hate now is gone thanks to the fact that the West got enlightened in many ways and became much more powerful than the Muslim world. But prejudice against Islam and Muslims still lingers in the West whenever someone feels moved enough to malign Islam and Muslims.

Second, Palestine whose Jewish character was destroyed by the Romans thousands of years ago became over the centuries part of the Arab and Muslim world. However a great many Jews clung to the dream of once again inhabiting and ruling Palestine. Ever since the Jews seized Palestine by force in 1948, they used all possible political means to first create and then maintain Israel. Among other things they found helpful was to use the media in keeping a negative image of Islam and Muslims in the West. Islam in the western media is generally associated with the desert, with a Bedouin lifestyle, with backwardness, with violence and terrorism, and with the maltreatment of and discrimination against women. Islam is generally portrayed as a threat to free thought and civil liberties, a threat to progress and development, and a threat to world peace and stability. The media in the western world is still overwhelmed by the tendency to portray a distorted image of Islam."

You said, "Christianity also has the perfect world for women. To be loved and protected by a man who loves her as Christ (God) loves him..."

Muslims believe in the One, Eternal Allah, who created the heavens and the earth and all that exists. In Arabic Allah is called Allah. There is absolutely

no difference between Allah and the Allah of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Muslims do not believe that Prophet Mohamed was the only Prophet; rather they believe he was the last of the Prophets of the Old and New Testaments. The Holy Koran is the revealed and sacred scripture of Islam, and it teaches:

"Say (O Muslims), 'We believe in Allah and that which is sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets of their lord. We do not differentiate between any of them, and to Him we are submissive (Muslims.)" (2, 136).

The most fundamental concept of Islam and the fountainhead of all its other principles and practices is the Oneness of Allah. Islam is monotheism in its purest form, and the logic of pure monotheism is the thread that runs through the entire fabric of the Islamic way of life. Islam teaches a fundamental difference between Allah the Creator and that which He has created. The sky, the moon, the stars, the harmony and perfection of the natural world, the grace and beauty of the human body and the excellence of the human mind, the alternation of day and night, the change of the seasons, and the mystery of life and death all point to something greater than man and beyond his comprehension.

To the believer these are all signs of Allah. Islam teaches that Allah is not to be likened to anything that He has created. He is All-Powerful, All-Knowing; He is beyond any imperfection, and is the fulfillment of all Perfection. He is not a substance, nor is He like any of His creatures. Allah is not a far away and distant Allah, nor is He unapproachable ideal. He is All-Kind, All-Merciful, and the Turner of hearts.

Muslims believe in the Angels of Allah, and His Prophets, peace be upon them. They believe in resurrection of the dead and the end of the world; they believe in the coming of the Day of Judgment and eternal life in Paradise or Hell.

Islam teaches that Allah is eternal. He was not himself born, nor has he fathered a son or a daughter. Islam rejects the concept of the incarnation of Allah, which is found in Hinduism, Christianity, and other religions, and believes that the concept of incarnation limits the concept of Allah and destroys the believer's conviction of the activeness and perfection of Allah. The Koran describes Allah being perfect and active:

"Allah, there is no Allah except Him. The Living, the Everlasting. Neither dozing nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens

and the earth. Who is he that shall intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what will be before their hands and what was behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He willed. His seat embraces the heavens and earth, and the preserving of them does not weary Him. He is the High, the Great. (Baqara, 255).

Islam rejects the notion that Jesus, peace be upon him, was the Allah or the Son of Allah. Rather it honors and respects him as one of the great messengers and prophets of Allah to the children of Israel. The Koran emphasizes the Unity and Oneness of Allah without any partners or sons:

And they say: "Allah most gracious has begotten a son." Indeed you have made an abominable assertion! – Whereby the heavens are almost torn, and the earth is split asunder, and the mountains fall in ruins, that they ascribe a son to the Most Gracious. And it is not befitting for the Most Gracious to beget a son. There is none in the heavens and the earth but comes unto the Most Gracious as a servant (Maryam, 88-93).

Islam rejects the Pauline concept of trinity and considers it a contradiction of pure monotheism. It also rejects the argument of Christians that Allah made Himself incarnate in Jesus, so that He could be known to men, and also rejects the argument that Jesus died on the cross for mankind's sins. Islam teaches that no human being can bear the burden of another's responsibility. Each Muslim is taught that every individual must carry the responsibility of his/her actions and that no one can carry that burden for them.

Faith without action is a dead letter. Islam teaches us that faith by itself is not enough until it is transformed into action. Prophet Mohamed said:

"Faith does not depend on raising hopes, but it is something that is firmly established in the heart and is ascertained by action. Indeed, there are people who have been deceived by their hopes, so that they finally leave this world without merit. They used to say, 'We have good expectations in Allah.' Yet they only deceived themselves. For had they truly placed good expectations in Allah, they would have excelled in good deeds."

Muslims believe in the divine origin of the Bible although they doubt the historical authenticity of some parts of the Old and New Testaments and do

not believe them to be exact representations of what Allah originally revealed.

Islam believes that man can come to know Allah and feel close to Him by means of proper praying, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, and righteous deeds. The very practice of Islam is meant to purify the believer's soul and to bring him closer to Allah.

Allah is very aware of our human weaknesses and imperfection. He does not condemn us because we are imperfect; rather He guides us to self-perfection and He forgives us and showers His Mercy upon us when we fail and then sincerely ask His forgiveness.

Although Muslims believe that Allah is All-Powerful and maintains complete control over His creation, they also believe that Allah has created man with free will and the ability to choose and act, and that Allah is just in making man morally responsible for what he does during his/her lifetime.

You said, "In Islam if woman has sex outside of marriage she can be murdered by her family or the government in the cruelest ways, but for the man there is no punishment."

"Unmarried man or woman if they have sex outside of marriage Islam considers their act as a clear fornication. Both are whipped 100 lashes before a gathering witnessing their humiliation. If both were married, they are thrown by stones in a ditch until death. This penalty however requires four witnesses known by piety and credibility to swear in court that they have seen them doing the sexual act. If the four witnesses altogether are not available to the court the penalty is not concluded and the suspected are released and left to their conscious to seek Allah's forgiveness. Muslims didn't invent this kind of punishment but its Allah's instructions in the Koran. This punishment was known before Islam in old religions including Judaism. Spreading debauchery under the pretense of love or modern lifestyle is considered as a big sin in Islam. Fornication spreads diseases and mixes lineages and roots and causes corruption. Debauchery in the United States spread to the extent of reaching the Presidents!"

Allah says in the Koran:

Indeed those who love that obscenity should be spread among the believers, shall have a painful chastisement in this life and in the Hereafter, and Allah knows but you do not know (An Noor 19).

As for your saying, 'We cannot see any benefit to being a Muslim woman.'

One of the great beauties of Islam is its simplicity, naturalness, and lack of formalities. Islam is the religion of Adam and of mankind in its earliest and most advanced stages of development. Allah says in the Holy Koran:

"Therefore set your face to the religion purely, the upright creation upon which He originated people. There is no changing of the creation of Allah. This is the valuable religion, although most people do not know." (30, 30).

Among the many benefits of embracing Islam are that once you bear witness that: "There is no Allah except Allah, and Mohamed is His Prophet" all your sins are forgiven and are transformed into merits with an enormous award awaiting you in paradise. In addition, you receive the reward of believing the religion of the Prophet Jesus if you are a Christian, or Prophet Moses if you are a Jew, and the religion of Prophet Mohamed, which means that you receive two huge rewards, and you know that Allah loves you because He guided you to Him."

Jennifer looked at Omar and said appreciatively, "Who are you - a sea of knowledge?"

Omar answered smiling, "I am just a Muslim looking at the universe with Allah's eye.