



Is Islam the Answer?

*T*he foundational, original text documents of Islam will not change. The schools of Islamic thought, intent on adhering to the strictest interpretations of both the Noble Qur'an and the Hadith, are frozen in time through the classical rulings of the past. The frequently-heard call in Arab countries that "Islam Is the Answer" is a call back to a mythical "golden age of Islam," which is romanticized as the era of pure, real, and true Islam.

But Islam was never pure or real or true at all. And a call to it is a call to bondage for women.

FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAM = ORTHODOX ISLAM

Islamic fundamentalist groups are led by men who are well educated in the doctrines of orthodox Islam. Many hold degrees from Islamic universities or Qur'anic schools. Most are considered "clerics" and are often addressed with titles such as "ayatollah," "imam," or "mullah." Contrary to the protests of contemporary Muslim apologists, especially those in the West, the fundamental teachings of Islam these leaders present is entirely accurate.

In Afghanistan, the fundamentalist group was the Taliban—a word that means "students." Members of the Taliban were all disciples

of classical Islam, knew the Noble Qur'an *by heart*, and studied the Hadith and the various schools of Islamic law meticulously. The kind of government the Taliban instituted is a prime example of what fundamentalist ("original text") Islam's perfect world would be like.

Without exception, countries overtaken by fundamental Islamic power-groups like the Taliban show extreme deterioration in all parameters of social, political, and religious life for women. Leila Ahmed, in her impressive book titled *Women and Gender in Islam*, notes:

States in which Islamic groups have recently seized power and reinstated Islamic laws have thus far invariably enacted laws imposing severe new restrictions on women and sometimes also laws resulting in savage injustice and inhumanity toward women.

Researchers have found that in Pakistan "the vilification of women increased . . . in direct proportion to the spouting of self-righteous declarations of a new Islamic order."¹

Ahmed is sympathetic to Islam, yet is compelled by academic honesty to enumerate examples of legislation and rhetoric directed at the subjugation of women in these societies. At the conclusion of the list, she writes:

All the above laws and decrees, those of both Iran and Pakistan, directly reflect or are entirely compatible with Sharia views as interpreted by establishment Islam. There is every reason to believe that any government declaring itself committed to Islamization, along either Sunni or Shia lines, would introduce similar laws for women.²

Ahmed is incredulous that in a recent survey the majority of Egyptian women, both veiled and unveiled, were *positive* toward

recent proposals that Egyptian civil law be brought into greater conformity with shari'ah law. Ahmed writes:

It is surely extremely doubtful that either group has any idea of the extremes of control, exclusion, injustice, and indeed brutality that can be, in the present order of things, legitimately meted out to women in the name of Islam.³

It is not necessary or desirable in this book to describe these extreme and horrific things. Many are well known. The complete and total veiling of women in Afghanistan (wearing the burqa) is actually one of the *milder* outcomes. Others are more hidden and insidious, including the persistent practice of maliciously maiming and killing women in the name of "honor," carried out by male family members (including drowning, stoning, stabbing, and burning), female genital mutilation (claimed as a cultural practice, but endorsed within certain branches of Islam), and public beating and humiliation for women who are not dressed appropriately or who wear makeup or other such forbidden items. This book cannot contain the number of documented events of these kinds. A bibliography of resources on these topics begins on page **123**. These resources are compelling and appalling reading.

MEDIA FOCUS ON WOMEN IN ISLAM

Secular resources are replete with information on women's status in Islamic countries. *Time* magazine ran a special issue titled "Lifting the Veil." Here are some excerpts:⁴

It is hard to find a woman in Kabul now who does not remember *a beating at the hands of the Taliban*.

As Riffat Hassan, professor of religious studies at the University of Louisville, puts it, "the way Islam has been practiced in most Muslim societies for centuries has *left millions of Muslim women with battered bodies, minds, and souls*."