



Cartoons, Prophets and Faith

by Roland Müller



In 2005 a Danish newspaper published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed; little did the editor realize that this was to ignite an explosion. As Muslims around the world eventually began to protest in anger and outrage more Western newspapers and magazines republished the cartoons, claiming that they were defending freedom of speech. Embassies and churches were burned and people were killed.

In the West, we watched with puzzlement. Why were Muslims so upset about these cartoons of Mohammed? After all, people have mocked Jesus for centuries, but we don't go around killing people. Surely freedom of speech is far more important than a bit of scorn! After all, many in the West have fought and died to defend the right of free speech. Surely Muslims realize this.

In much of the East, feelings are quite different. Most Muslims live in what are known as shame-based cultures. These cultures are based on shame and honor rather than right and wrong. Almost every decision they make is made by considering what is honorable and what is shameful. Sociologists tell us that in the West we live in what are known as guilt-based cultures where most decisions are made on the basis of right and wrong. Whereas in the West we are more likely to lay down our lives to defend our rights, in the East people will lay down their lives to defend honor.

Muslims even have a legal term known as "honor killing," believing that the shedding of blood can wash away shame. Those who bring shame on a family or a tribe can be put to death, whether they are an enemy or an immediate family member.

In some strange way, the Danish cartoons created a very volatile situation where the rights of the West and the shame of the East collided. Both sides are defending what they believe is of utmost importance. Both sides are willing to fight to the death.

Where do we stand as Christians? Jesus died on the cross, not only to remove our guilt, but also to take our shame. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, shame came upon all mankind. Some cultures are far more sensitive to this shame than they are to the guilt that Westerners often experience. No matter, Jesus died to free us all from the stain of sin, and this includes both shame and guilt.

The only way to really rectify the situation is for each side to recognize that the answer is in the death of Jesus on the cross. Jesus is the only one who can both set things right and also restore the honor that was lost. Jesus took our guilt and our shame upon himself. The reason he was mocked and ridiculed was because our shame was being laid on him.

If only we were as enthusiastic about sharing this gospel message as we are about defending our rights. The Lord Jesus honored the Father through his obedience unto death. He has removed our shame and guilt. Let us live in such a way that we honor the Lord in word and deed.

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Muslims remember the glories of their past.
Humiliation is difficult for them to bear.

