

Honour and Dishonour

Both **Muslims** and **Christians** would say they seek to uphold the honour of God. How they do so can look very different. For Muslims to uphold God's honour, it would seem that violence is not only often allowed, but also called for. For Christians, violence is generally seen as dishonouring God (there is a 'just war' concept in Christianity).

Islam developed in a middle eastern **honour culture** context. In honour culture one's honour, and the honour of one's family, clan, tribe, nation, God, etc is seen a primary good / need. Honour is to be upheld and restored, even by violent action, so as to not come into shame and disgrace. While it may be true that many, perhaps most Muslims, would not agree with honour killing, **honour killing** nevertheless has a long history among Muslim people. Research indicates that 96% of all honour killings in Europe are perpetrated by Muslims, mostly directed against female family members who are seen to have dishonoured their family (most especially by converting away from Islam).

It is reported that in **Mohammad's** life he ordered or approved to have killed various people who mocked him:

1. Asma bint Marwan killed 624 in front of her children for writing poems denouncing Mohammad. (*Ibn Hisham & Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah*)
2. Jewish man Abu Afak killed 624 for writing poems opposing

- Mohammad. (*Ibn Hisham & Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah*)
3. Al Nadr ibn al-Harith killed 624 for mocking the Koranic revelations. (*Sura 83:13*)
 4. Uqba bin Abu Muayt killed 624 for throwing entrails over Mohammad. (*Sahih Bukhari 1:9:499*)
 5. Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf killed 624 for insulting writings. (*Sahih Bukhari 5:59:369*)
 6. Fartana and Qurayba slave girls killed 630 for singing satirical songs about Mohammad. (*Abu Dawud 14:2678*)
 7. Ka'b ibn Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulama killed Jan 630 for writing satirical poems about Mohammad. (*Ibn Hisham & Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah*)
 8. Hubayrah killed 630 for writing poems that mocked Mohammad. (*Ibn Hisham & Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah*)

The example of **Mohammad** finds its ready expression in today's world, where so many Moslems seemingly cannot countenance for one moment, anything said against **Mohammad** or Islam generally, but instead will rise up **violently** to restore their / **Mohammad** / Allah's honour. Some examples:

1989: Author Salman Rushdie published the 'Satanic Verses'. His negative depiction of **Mohammad** led to violence, riots, and the issuing of a 'fatwa' by the Iranian Ayatollah, condemning him, and anyone associated with the publication of the book, to death. The Ayatollah called on Muslims everywhere to carry out the execution. The Islamic organization the '15 Khordad Foundation' even offered a 1 million dollar reward for

Rushdie's killing, which increased over time to nearly 3 million. Several writers and translators with links to Rushdie have been attacked or killed over the years. The Fatwa was never rescinded and as recently as 2022 an attempt was made on Rushie's life by a Muslim, resulting in the loss of an eye.

2005: After a Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten published a cartoon depicting **Mohammad** wearing a fused bomb as a turban, violent demonstrations and riots took place in a number of Muslim countries, resulting in 200 deaths. Many death threats were made against the newspaper staff and the cartoonists at the time, and later on attempts were made to kill them. Christian churches, businesses were attacked and Christians killed in Nigeria. A Coptic priest was knifed to death in Egypt by a 25yr old Muslim, and 2 Coptic churches attacked with 10 Christians injured.

2012: When a short anti-Islamic film 'Innocence of Muslims' was released, this sparked outrage across the Muslim world. Large scale demonstrations and violent protests erupted in Egypt before spreading to different parts of the Arab world. More than 50 people died. Fatwas were called to harm the actors of the movie, and the Pakistan government minister Bashir Ahmad Bilour offered a bounty for the killing of the producer of the movie.

2023: In Pakistan after (false) allegations of blasphemy were made against a Christian, Muslims turned out in the thousands (encouraged by local Imams using mosque loudspeakers) and burned down at least 24 churches, and scores of Christian homes.

In addition to a long history of Muslims reacting violently when 'dishonoured', there is also a long history of Muslims acting to **dishonour Christianity and other faiths as a means of honouring Allah**. In parts of Europe where there are increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants, there are also increasing incidents of

Christian churches being desecrated. Over the course of their history many Muslims have read Quranic verses such as Sura 9:29 as commanding them to **humiliate and subjugate Christians to affirm the superiority of Islam**, and so honour Allah.

How does this compare with Christianity?

When the opening ceremony at the France Olympics depicted a last supper scene that was offensive to Christians, there was protest, but there were no riots. Why not? If someone decided to publicly burn a Bible, it is highly unlikely that any Christian would choose to riot or use violence. Many people in the West dishonour

Jesus by constantly using his name as a swear word. But what Christian ever rises up violently in response? Why is there such a difference between Muslims and Christians in this area? **Are Christians not interested in upholding the 'honour' of God / Jesus?**

In the prayer **Jesus** taught his disciples the very first petition Christians are to pray is: **"Hallowed be your name"**. The request here is that God would bring glory and honour to his name, that his holiness and goodness would show out to the world.

So, what does God do to bring honour to his name? Paradoxically, he steps into dishonour.

Jesus teaches an amazing parable in Luke 15 in which a father, who has been dishonoured by his son (who had effectively wished his father dead by asking for his inheritance), hoists up his robe and, in an undignified manner, runs out to his wayward son as he sees him returning home. This shows the dishonour God is willing to enter into in order to receive people to himself, ie save them. This willingness to be dishonoured in the eyes of the world reaches its peak in **Jesus'** death on the

cross. **God sent his only begotten Son (in a sense he gave all of himself) to die a shameful (in the eyes of the world) death on the cross. In loving obedience to his Father, Jesus willingly allowed himself to be humiliated, degraded, treated like rubbish.** He did this to pay for the sins of the world, so that people could be forgiven and

received as children of God. The action of **Jesus** here is the example Christians are to follow. In the book of Hebrews the writer Paul says: **'Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured'** (13:13).

Jesus said that the world will hate Christians as the world hated him, but that Christians in love are to nevertheless proclaim the good news of life through Jesus, even if this brings the hatred / violence of the world upon them. When persecuted, Christians are to pray for the persecutors. They are to love their enemies, and not return evil for evil. In this way they reveal the God of long-suffering love, and give glory and honour to him. Though they might come to be humiliated by the degrading actions of others against them, **Christians know that they have already been highly honoured by God.** God has already raised them up to life with him, seated them 'in Christ' in the heavenly realm, declared them to be his sons and daughters for eternity. So honoured by God, Christians will endure being dishonoured by others for the sake of presenting the good news of Jesus to the world.

Dear Moslem, you believe you honour Jesus greatly by affirming him as a prophet of Allah. But if **Jesus** truly is **God, Lord, and Saviour** as Christianity teaches, then saying he is no more than a prophet hugely dishonours him, as does the ongoing use of violence. Sadly, your efforts to honour God only dishonour him.

