

When Pedophilia Is Called Culture

I just finished reading a nauseating *New York Times* article I found on MSN today. I'm troubled, mad, and even a bit indignant. Before I start a fast and impulsive rant, you would do well to read the article I'm referring to.

The headline is U.S. Soldiers told to Ignore Afghan Allies' Abuse of Boys and it's as bad as it sounds. You should read it yourself, but here's an executive summary. I will do my best to get the facts right:

*In some Afghan circles, it is a sign of prestige to keep young boys as sex slaves.

*Some of the Afghan officers that we (the U.S. military) helped put into power are practicing this tradition. It sometimes even happens on U.S. military installations.

*Because the U.S. mission is to "fight the Taliban" and not to "stop molestation," our military men and women have been instructed to turn a blind eye to the practice.

*A few U.S. soldiers have been reprimanded for trying to protect children.

To all of this I want to scream: "WE ARE BETTER THAN THIS!"

When I was a young sociology student in college, I started to buy into a form of cultural relativism. This is the belief that an individual human's beliefs and activities should be understood by others in terms of that individual's own culture. In other words, we can't judge another's beliefs and practices because what they do might work in their culture.

It took me about two semesters to shake that nonsense out of my head. However, that is just the kind of drivel that allows injustices like this to happen in a part of the world where Americans are putting their lives at stake.

I know that there are very complex diplomatic issues to consider, but if we can't at the very least agree that protecting the young from harm is a core value of our mission, then what are we doing over there? If we cannot say to those whom we are arming and training that "this is wrong and you cannot do this on our watch," then we are trading one evil (The Taliban) for another (a child abuser that we support.) Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss.

The Christian roots of America are far better than the Islamic roots of the Middle East.

The conditions of the human heart that would allow a culture (even a small portion of it) to allow this absolutely floors me. There are those who argue that all religions are the same ... that Christianity and Islam are about the same. Those people are wrong. While one may find that the laws in the holy texts of these two religions are rooted in similar principles, the fruit they bear is radically different.

America is not a Christian nation. We are too free for that. But most would agree that our values and way of life are rooted in what I presumed was a universal standard of right and wrong. Caring for the weak and protecting the innocent is hard-wired into our culture. This must be, to some extent, a reflection of our Christian heritage.

While we assume that this is normal around the world, there are plenty of Muslim nations who don't operate that way. On a trip to the Middle East, I saw Muslim women treated as third-class citizens. I read articles in official Muslim

publications about how women who are raped are always to blame (and how their murder is permitted.) I have even read recent news reports of Muslim nations denying entry to Syrian refugees. As in: "None of you are welcome here." All the while, Europe (and hopefully America) are finding a way.

While Islam and Christianity have similar "laws," the fruit of our lives could not be more opposed. How many hospitals in developing nations are there because of Islamic relief work? (I've never seen one ... if you know a stat on this, I'd be happy to publish it.) How many world hunger programs (not in the Middle East) are sponsored by Muslims? This is a religion with laws to obey but without a fundamental directive to change the corrupt nature of the human heart. My Christian faith is better than that.

I want to believe that our nation is better than that, too. While America is not a Christian nation, our culture believes that protecting the innocent is a non-negotiable. That includes children who are sexually abused. (I know the Catholic church has had some struggles with this in the past; it appears that they are striving to right those wrongs.) We should demand this same standard from our allies, even if it disrupts their culture. I pray that our country would support our soldiers when they try to hold these people accountable for the actions. Support them. Don't punish them.

We should send our troops into dangerous places not just to protect U.S. interests but to project fundamental values of right and wrong. Because if we can't work to change hearts and minds, we are allowing evil to continue. And we are better than that.

At least I thought we were.

Barrett Johnson *leads a national parachurch family ministry and blogs at . He recently released his second book, Your Imperfect and Normal Family.*