

When Christian Women Marry Muslim Men

☒ You've seen her—the veiled, dark-robed woman in the checkout line at Wal-Mart or Target. She's Muslim, you think to yourself, probably from the Middle East or Asia.

But on closer inspection, you discover that she has blue eyes. A few strands of sandy blond hair peek out from her head veil. Or perhaps she's black and speaks with a distinctly American accent.

She's not from the Middle East, you realize, but from your own backyard! In fact, she could be someone you went to high school with.

Why would an American woman marry a Muslim man and convert to his religion and way of life?

The answer might surprise you: She could have been tricked into conversion. And the result might be intense physical and emotional abuse.

In growing numbers, women all over the United States are marrying Muslim men from other countries. Many find themselves trapped in a nightmare of oppression, abuse and control, according to W.L. Cati, founder of Zannah Ministries, an organization that reaches out to women married to Muslims.

"I should not be alive," says Cati, an American woman who endured an abusive relationship with a Muslim man from the Middle East. After 14 years of horror, she managed to escape. Most women, she says, don't make it out alive.

"I'm not bashing Muslims," Cati says. "This is a morality issue. We're talking human rights.

"They are allowed to beat their wives and children. They are

even allowed to kill. And this is going on right here in the United States.”

Cati was born again in 1972. She loved the Lord and was in a full-time singing ministry. But when she met Muhammed, he swept her off her feet.

“He talked to me about his principles [and] family values,” she remembers. “That a wife doesn’t need to work, how a husband should be supportive of his wife. I thought, This is the man of my dreams. He was flamboyant, romantic, and passionate, and I fell head over heels for him.”

Cati’s Christian parents and friends tried to talk her out of it, but her mind was made up.

“The way he explained his religion sounded very much like my own,” she says. “He told me Allah meant ‘God’ in Arabic. He said that they believe in Jesus, heaven, hell, the Ten Commandments, angels, the prophets and the Bible.”

When Muhammed asked Cati to marry him, she said yes, promising to marry in a mosque and raise their children as Muslims.

During the ceremony, Cati repeated phrases in Arabic with no idea of what she was saying. After the ceremony, she read her marriage certificate and was shocked to find that her first name had been changed to a Muslim name and that she had converted to Islam. Her new husband assured her that it was “just on paper,” but suddenly Cati’s knight in shining armor turned into a nightmare.

“The more I submitted to his religion, the more he and his family had rights over me,” she explains. “He controlled everything—money, my decisions and my social life. He usually stayed out all night in strip bars or with other women. The physical abuse started while I was expecting our second child.”

On the outside, Cati's life looked like a Hollywood fantasy—seven homes, a nine-carat tennis bracelet and any car she wanted. But inside she was experiencing a living hell. She called the police many times to report beatings and other abuse but never pressed charges.

"My husband always made me feel like it was my fault that he hit me," she says. "I always ended up saying I was sorry to him."

In the midst of Cati's nightmare, her parents continued to pray for her. One day she and her husband rented their vacation home to a ladies' group.

"I didn't know they were Christians," she says. "They came in and started praying over everything. They prayed that I would come back to Jesus."

When Cati returned to the home, the Lord started speaking to her heart. A neighbor invited her to church, and surprisingly, her husband gave her permission to attend as long as she didn't convert.

"That night at church," she remembers, "I started crying and couldn't stop. I can't remember what was said, but God was talking to my heart."

Eventually, Cati reconverted to Christianity, making a decision that enraged her husband. Their children became born again and prayed for the salvation of their father. Finally, Muhammed threw them out of the house.

Cati was penniless, but "there was no pain or tears," she says. "God's mercy and grace gave us freedom from the Muslim way of life."

A Disturbing Trend

Sadly, Cati's story is not unusual. Thousands of American

women, including many born-again Christians, marry Muslim men. Most have no idea what Islam teaches about women or the rights it gives to their husbands.

For example, even though there are laws against polygamy in the United States, a Muslim man living here can marry up to four women—even if he already has a wife back in his own country. Marriages here are performed in a mosque, and if the couple does not apply for a marriage license, there is no way of showing the husband is already married.

According to Islam, a husband is allowed to beat his wife and children and to refuse to support his wife for any number of reasons. A father can beat a child who does not pray.

Wives do not jointly own property with their husbands; on the contrary, they are considered property themselves, the same as a house or a car. A wife can't spend her husband's money or allow anyone to enter his house—without his permission.

A wife inherits only a small portion of her husband's wealth; the rest goes to his parents, brothers, uncles and children, and male children receive double the portion of female children. If a man states, "I divorce you," three times to his wife's face, he considers himself legally divorced. His wife is not entitled to any of her husband's possessions, including his children. There are no visitation rights in Islam.

"A woman under the Islamic system of marriage has no human rights unless we consider that a slave has rights under a slave system," writes Dr. Nawal El Sa'dawi, who is Muslim, in her book, *The Hidden Face of Eve*. "Marriage, insofar as women are concerned, is just like slavery to the slave, or the chains of serfdom to the serf."

Not every Muslim man is abusive to his wife and children or follows these religious teachings, but it is important for women to learn about Islam if they are considering marrying a Muslim.

"We need to educate our women on what Islam really is versus what it appears to be," explains Nadia Maroudi, founder of Women Crossing Cultural Barriers, which is affiliated with Arab International Ministry. "They sell it as such a peaceful religion, and it's not."

One Muslim woman, for example, who is a medical doctor, told Maroudi that three of her patients were American women who had married Muslim men. Each man took his children back to his own country, then returned alone to a different city in the United States to marry another American woman (without divorcing his first wife) and start life all over again.

According to Voice of the Martyrs, an organization dedicated to aiding the persecuted church, the fast-paced growth of Islam in the West is due primarily not to conversion but to biological growth through marriage to Western women.

Maroudi was a born-again Christian when she married a Muslim from North Africa. He became a Christian after they were married, yet later divorced her because she could not have children.

"In his culture, in the first year of marriage the women are having babies," she explains. "Even though he was a believer, he was having a hard time handling the demands of his culture and former religion, so he divorced me."

While Maroudi was still married, the Lord challenged her to reach out to other women like herself. So she placed an ad in her local paper: "American Women Married to Muslims: Support group offering fun, fellowship and prayer."

The calls started coming in, and Maroudi's ministry was underway. "I was shocked at what was going on," Maroudi says. Although her husband never physically beat her, she has met many women who are regularly abused.

For six years, Maroudi's group has met regularly to share

support and encouragement. Women who attend come from Christian, Jewish and nonreligious backgrounds.

"I strengthen them in who they are and stress they are valued because of Jesus," Maroudi says. "I show them how to have a personal relationship with Him, [and] tell them what Christianity really believes versus what they're taught at the mosque. I pray for opportunities to talk about Jesus without bashing their husbands' religion.

"Muslims believe in a god," she continues, "and when you tell them you're going to help them become more godly, how can the men dispute that?" In fact, some Muslim men actually refer their wives to Maroudi's meetings, although others forbid their wives to attend or even talk to her on the phone.

Maroudi wants to start similar ministry support groups in every major city in the United States "so that there's not one woman who feels like I did," she says.

Cati's experiences also prompted her to launch an outreach to women married to Muslims. Zennah Ministries offers counseling, seminars and information services. "I promote the Lord Jesus and His ways and trust in Him to help make these women whole again," Cati says.

"We have extensive research and firsthand Islamic experience. We can provide truth about Allah, the Quran, Muhammad and the last days. We want to help [these women] break the bondage and stand firm in their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord."

Cati has written *Married to Muhammed* (Creation House Press), which provides graphic quotes from the Quran and Islamic holy texts—a shocking wake-up call to any woman considering a new life as the wife of a Muslim man. "I cut and pasted the information from their own [Islamic] Web sites," Cati says, "so it is their words, not mine."

Cati hopes to establish homes to help women who come out of

abusive Islamic marriages. "Once you come out of an abusive, cultic situation, you need a place to go," she says. "There are homes for drug addicts, but nothing for women who've been abused this way."

Adds Maroudi: "If we can get these women saved and on the right road, [they] can affect the whole family. My husband converted because he saw the change in me. I changed from being a pew-sitter to living for Jesus. And my husband saw that."

Perhaps God is bringing Muslim men to this country for just this reason—so that they can hear the gospel. And perhaps—if women like Cati and Maroudi continue to reach out—they will hear it through their wives.

Elisabeth Farrell is a frequent contributor to Charisma magazine. Reprinted with permission from Charisma magazine, "Married to Muhammed," June 2000. Published by Strang Communications.

Contact W.L. Cati at , and Nadia Maroudi at