

# Prisoner of her Islamic Father

by **Ida Magli**

*Il Giornale* | April 16th, 2011

The story of Jamila, a 14-years-old pakistani girl “transplanted” in a school of Brescia (Italy), is a tragic and touching one. Beautiful and sweet, hidden in the secret of her traditional dress, her behavior is so different from that of the other western girls, that she is attracting too much the interest and the eyes of her male schoolmates. She is a diligent and bright student, but she is too frequently absent from school, so that she is about to fail at school and this will jeopardize her residence permit. And it is not difficult to understand why. In muslim families, fathers and brothers have an absolute authority over their women. They want to avoid any danger of a possible sentimental or sexual relationship with strangers, since Jamila – as most of pakistani girls – has already been promised as spouse to a relative living in her home country. Therefore they forbid Jamila to go to school, and keep her at home. Her teachers are worried, and leave messages on the answering machine of her parents; her classmates send her free recharges for the cellphone, because they do not want to leave her alone.

But it is obvious that Jamila’s problem is far bigger than her, her friends and her teachers. it is also bigger than her relatives and parents, because its roots lie in the Old Testament, from which the Koran entirely took the first five books. There we have the requirements coming from the Genesis and the Leviticus, which date back to the customs and beliefs of nomad shepherds living at the times of Moses; they go back to the social tradition of a world where the only valid rule is that of the Sacred Book. Here is the main conflict: between the Sacred Book and us. The secular State with its laws on equality between men and women, on the right to study for all, and on the safeguard of the weaker as Jamila, is now at stake. But it is also a question of how the politicians did not take into account the many warnings they received about how difficult it is to respect the ethnic, religious and cultural differences, as they boasted to be doing. These differences cannot be overcome when there is a clash against the Sacred or the faith in a God. Jamila’s family is following its own rules when it is forcing her to obey to their authority, including marrying the man she has been promised to. But now the State must move from word to deeds, and our laws must prevail over muslim laws. The story of Jamila must be the right opportunity to set a general rule which will be the same for all the Jamila’s that are living and will live in our country.

Jamila is segregated at home? Then the magistrates must do something in front of such a crime; they must deal with this case knowing that they are not in front of one of those jealous and possessive fathers that sometimes live in Italy. They will face the authority and the rules that the Koran gives to the

father in the muslim family. Therefore the magistrates must negotiate with the representatives of the muslims some rules that are compatible with the italian laws, especially as far as the individual's rights recognized in Italy are concerned. This would be an extraordinary occasion to help the muslim world to get out of the psychological and cultural backwardness that is paralyzing it everywhere, condemning it to the economical and technical poverty that is a trademark of Pakistan and of many other countries in the Middle East and in Africa. Forgetting 'political correctness', it is about time to ask openly: *why are they so poor, since their homelands have so many treasures?* There are no doubts about the answer: it is because they are still living as at the time of Moses, with the same beliefs, customs, familiar and social rules of the shepherds of those times. It is fundamentally important to get out of this cultural ambience; but since it is based upon religious rules the religious authorities must be the ones that change their teachings. The Church could actively cooperate with this work of review and updating of the Sacred Books, and in this way it would be enacted the cooperation with the believers of different religions that the Church promoted since the times of Vatican Council II.

**Ida Magli**

*Rome, April 15th, 2011*