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## **Lying to hide an unacceptable truth**

By Jim Taylor

The jury in the murder trial of Mohammed Shafia, his son Hamed, and his second wife Tooba Yahya, returned the right verdict – guilty!.

No doubt some will say that the media had already found Shafia guilty of the “honour killing” of his first wife and three teenage daughters. But post-trial reports reveal that some of the most incriminating evidence was never published during the trial itself.

For example, that the ignition in the Nissan Sentra that plunged into a lock in the Rideau Canal near Kingston was switched off.

Or that the front seats of the Sentra were fully tipped back – not a feasible driving position. And that its headlights were turned off – for a night joyride?

Also, that the driver’s window was open. So water pressure would not have trapped the victims inside the car. Why did no one open a door and swim to the surface? Why did no one climb out the open window?

The only possible answer is that all four victims were already dead. They were stuffed inside the car, before it was pushed over the edge into the canal. To ensure that an autopsy would discover a cause of death consistent with a car plunging into a canal, someone must have held each woman’s head underwater until she drowned.

## **Trapped between two mindsets**

I find such callous cruelty unimaginable. I can’t imagine myself doing that to a kitten, let alone a member of my family.

But perhaps the killers couldn’t imagine doing anything else.

The problem is a cultural mindset that, unfortunately, few commentators have bothered exploring.

Social anthropologists explain that our “western” society works on a guilt/innocence model. Right and wrong define our standards. Individuals make choices, and live with the consequences.

The eastern world operates on an honour/shame model. It’s not about what you do, but about its effect on the reputation of your family, clan, or caste. Collective honour matters more than love, genetics, or moral principles. West of India, shame is commonly expiated by revenge; east of India, by suicide.

Western sensibilities are baffled, even outraged, when a rape victim is further punished. From an eastern perspective, if she has been dishonoured, so has her family. To restore its reputation, the family must punish the source of its dishonour.

## **Biblical examples**

The honour/shame mentality has been around a long time. The Bible is full of examples.

Jacob had twelve sons, who founded the twelve tribes of Israel. Also one daughter, Dinah. Genesis 34 describes how Dinah was raped and seized by a local warlord's son. The son offered to marry Dinah, but Jacob's boys argued, 'To give our sister to one who is uncircumcised would disgrace us.'

As a gesture of conciliation, the warlord agreed to have himself, and all his male subjects, circumcised.

While they were "still in pain," the Bible relates – doubled up, unable to stand let alone defend themselves - Jacob's sons slaughtered them all. Thus Jacob's honour was restored.

There is, however, no further reference to Dinah. Draw your own conclusions.

In another example, an Israelite general, Jephthah, promised his fellow officers that if God granted him victory, he would sacrifice the first living thing that greeted him on his triumphant return home. His daughter, his only child, ran out to meet him. Rather than lose face, he kept his vow.

Centuries later, the New Testament's Letter to the Hebrews still applauds Jephthah as a model worth emulating.

## Bungled cover-up

Given their background, Shafia and Yahya probably could not imagine letting their daughters dishonour the family by copying North American dating customs. When *La Presse* reporter Michele Ouimet interviewed Yahya's relatives in Afghanistan, their comments indicated wholehearted support for the murders.

So I'm guessing that the Shafias were torn by two traditions. One, they brought with them. The other, they were learning. That's why they had to lie. That's why they tried to cover up their actions.

If Mohammed Shafia and Tooba Yahya truly believed they were doing right, they would have felt no need to hide the truth. Author Roland Muller describes finding a teenage girl, lying in a Middle-Eastern street, shot four times in the head. Her brother calmly declared to two policemen, "There she is. I killed her because she was in an immoral situation with a man."

By his country's ethics, he had not committed murder; he had proudly preserved the honour of his family.

Despicable as it seems, the Shafias cover-up is a sign of progress. A lie is necessary only because its teller realizes that the truth is not acceptable.

A frightening thought remains -- what if Shafia and Yahya hadn't bungled the business of dumping the car and its passengers into the canal? What if police investigations hadn't forced them to lie, to cover up their conspiracy? Would they then have believed they were justified in murdering their family members?

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## YOUR TURN

Isabel Gibson noted that by the time last Sunday's column appeared, the COPA/PIPA legislation appeared to have been shelved – for the time being.

Like me, she feels the writer's dilemma: "As a paid writer/editor in my day job, and an unpaid writer in my blog, I have struggled with whether to give away content. So far, I have found no practical way to be paid for what I love to write. I could add advertisements, but my audience is small and diverse -- hardly an advertiser's dream! I could try to charge my readers directly, but that protocol is not yet widely accepted. I expect that pay-per-view mechanisms will, eventually, become the new normal - at least until the next shift!

"In the meantime, I join the legion of people who do what they love and don't get paid for it -- from church choir singers to leaders of young people's groups.

"As for the larger game -- it will, indeed, be interesting to see how it plays out, given the relative power positions of the interested parties."

John Hatchard drew my attention to what he called the "big brother" of COPA/PIPA – ACTA, the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement. "It appears to be binding on signatories to the World Trade Agreement," John

wrote. "Why did [U.S.] Congress bother trying to flex copyright muscle when the big international corporations have already done it?"

Freda Stewart had some strong words about "political grandstanding."

"The U.S. Congress needs to spend more time on the economic woes of the U.S., which can ultimately cause disaster to the rest of the world, instead of butting their noses in to try to control small corners of the world. This was an extremely poorly thought out plan, and probably will cause a lot of grief. I do not mean to deprive writers or other artists of their earned income. But I love technology and wish I understood my computer. I actually learned to type on an old Smith Corona with raised metal edges on the keys. Good for producing blisters! Each new invention up through IBM Selectrics to the current [word processing programs] has been a magnificent change, both for time and ease of work. Surely there can be a meeting of reasonable minds instead of political grandstanding."

Cliff Boldt thought my column suggested the old adage: "lead, follow or get out of the way."

He mused, "I sometimes lead (within my generation); more often follow (the younger folks); and other times I get out of the way (travelling in the slow lane or on secondary streets and roads gets me there too)".

Ian Otterbein shared a couple of cartoons, that had appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*, about the Northern Gateway pipeline (January 15 column).

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## ABOUT MY BOOKS, ETC.

I have a few copies of a book my father wrote exploring Christian theology through Christian art.

The problem with art, of course, is that it cannot put an abstract concept on canvas. An artist cannot paint an Incarnation or a Resurrection without putting real humans, in real situations, into the picture. The expression, therefore, has to be grounded in a particular culture and society; the infinite and universal has to be represented in finite terms.

My father – who once took art lessons from members of Canada's Group of Seven – spent much of his life after retiring as principal of the Vancouver School of Theology, seeking out the ways artists through the centuries had attempted to deal with this dilemma. I'm probably biased, but I think that in examining the ways art portrays theological concepts, he explained those concepts better than most theological texts.

The book is *Seeing the Mystery: Exploring Christian Faith through the Eyes of Artists*, by William S. Taylor, 94 pages. There are only about 20 copies left in the world. Most of the illustrations are in full colour.

If you would like a copy, write to me – Jim Taylor, 1300 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Lake Country, BC, Canada, V4V 2H7.

Unfortunately, I can't send these out on the honour system, as I do with my biblical paraphrases. I will have to charge \$30 Canadian to include postage, paid in advance.

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## TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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## PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Model T Websites." a simple (and cheap) seven-page website for congregations who want to develop a web presence <<http://www.modeltwebsites.com>>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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