

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter



Afghanistan has no monopoly on human deprivation

I really didn't plan to write again so soon about the tragedy in New York City on September 11th, but I feel compelled to write about the terrible atrocities committed by the Taliban, now governing Afghanistan, all in the name of religion. We do some terrible things in this world in the name of religion, and some of them right in this country — and by established, mainstream religions.

Most churches in this country used to severely restrict the role of women in the church. We were not allowed to vote, serve on the church council, usher, serve communion and many other tasks important in the church. Of course, we were welcomed into the arenas of kitchens, child care and music.

When I read about the public executions in Afghanistan, I think of the hangings, beatings, stonings and public executions of both women and blacks in our own country's early history. I think of the beliefs of some of us in the early days and still today that women should not be educated, be ministers, priests, doctors, athletes, vote, run for elected office. Some of the letters to this very newspaper are from men who would probably feel more comfortable in Afghanistan, where women can't be schooled, leave the house without her husband or brother, must be covered from head to toe by a Burqa, have no activities of any kind outside the home. Afghan women cannot deal with male vendors or doctors. They are never to be seen in public

or have their photos displayed, even in their own homes. Even the windows of homes are to be painted, so no one can see a woman inside.

If women violate these rules, they are publicly beaten, usually to death, or verbally abused and harassed. While women are caged, it's against Taliban law to cage an animal or a bird. The abusive physical and mental acts towards women are almost too horrible to talk about or picture.

Of course, men are executed at the drop of a hat, for no reason at all, and newspapers are telling the stories of the Taliban increasing their brutality — if that's possible — because of their panic at what is to come and a seeming loss of support.

Jay Leno's wife, Mavis Leno, appeared on the Today Show on Tuesday and she is active in the Feminist Majority Foundation, deeply involved in trying to help the women of Afghanistan. I hope her message gets to our military planners. She has little faith in the Northern Alliance, for whom we are thinking of providing support, because they have been fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. She says they are just as bad, uneducated, and have proven they cannot govern. They were previously part of the Taliban organization.

The terrible brutality of humans against humans that exists in many countries of this world, and sometimes exists in our own country, should remind us that as humans we are all capable of sinking to the depths of depravity. We have to be vigilant about terrorism from foreign countries, but also about prejudice, ignorance and brutality in our own wonderful country. We know from the terrorist event in Oklahoma City that sometimes the enemy is within.

Wherever these things reside, they can not be tolerated. And we certainly should not accept man-made rules subjugating any human being in the name of religion.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at (309) 342-1337 or cporter@galesburg.net.