



**RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE:  
CAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
JUSTIFY DIVORCE?**

ARISE REPORTER



Oh, yeah! It is controversial, isn't it? I mean divorce. Two persons, a man and a woman formally joined together in holy matrimony parting ways. It is irrational; she calls it quits. She is supposed to stay in her marital home and put on her everlasting garment of patience, humility and perseverance, since she pledged "for good or for worse".

Marriage is supposed to be permanent, Christianity teaches. If you are a Christian, you probably know one profound reference in the Bible where divorce may be permitted – infidelity. "Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Mathew 19:9).

So, in the case of infidelity, divorce may be allowed. But even then, many will make a case for forgiveness and contend that even when unfaithfulness becomes the untimely visitor in a marriage, forgiveness should overrule any other reactions. Granted. We should all be loving and forgiving. A society without such virtues can be dangerous. You cannot imagine living in the community defined by hate, revenge and malice. That would be terrible! But should she live in a home (not a community, which is much bigger) where she is assaulted, physically harmed?

It is very hard to justify infidelity in a marriage. What can possibly justify it? Probably not many reasons, if any. But there is not one reason that can justify domestic violence against a woman. When he flexes his muscles and hits her whom he promised to love and protect, he has lost it. He has no claim to the beauty of husband and wife living together, in love. She has no business hanging on in there, not any longer. She should quit, I'm sorry! Oh, did I say "I am sorry"? No! There is no need to apologise. It is simply unacceptable.

One of the major reasons advanced for divorce in case she commits adultery is that, she defiled her marital bed. How could she? they say. The same people, however, will say nothing if they don't speak in praise of a man who did exactly the same thing. They will say "omusajja assajjalaata", a Luganda proverb that loosely translates as a man is free to do whatever he



pleases, including having an affair. I am not saying women should be unfaithful, absolutely not. What I demand of society is equality and fairness for both sexes.

If by committing adultery a woman defies her marital bed, then a man who physically assaults his wife does worse. He defiles the body that lies on the marital bed. And the marital bed can never be holy when the body that lies on it is defiled. In essence, physical assault has no place in a marriage, whatsoever.

Am I locking out forgiveness and reconciliation in a marriage? No. I firmly believe in the concept of a marriage being permanent. I believe it was God's idea, a noble idea, that the two – man and woman – whom he joins together, in love, no one should put asunder. What I am saying is that when he ceases to respect your body and instead harms it, do not wait for him to kill you and then forgive him. You need to forgive him when you are still alive; dead people do not forgive. Plan your exit and then forgive him.

You have heard men who, unthinkably, say "I didn't think she would die", or those who, sadly, claim their cultures teach that if he doesn't beat you, he

doesn't love you. How unfortunate! These are retrogressive, archaic, unfounded cultural practices that do not have any place in the 21st century.

The reality is that physical assault of women in marriage has often resulted in women losing their lives. I am not talking about things I heard or read about, but what I have witnessed. In the small village of Kikooba, Kiboga district, Joyce Namusoke was married to her husband and the couple had two sons. The man was violent. He beat her routinely. One time he beat her when she was expecting their third child. She had a miscarriage. And because of the poverty that choked their marital home, Namusoke did not get medical treatment. She would later die from her injuries. What did the man do thereafter? He abandoned the two orphaned boys in the makeshift structure they called a house and got married – yes, got married – to a widow in a village 4 km away. I run a charity organisation in the area. By the time we learnt of the incident, the makeshift structure where the boys lived was about to collapse on them. We mobilised and built a house for the orphans, but Namusoke had lost her life. Should women leave behind helpless orphans as a result of the actions of their selfish husbands? We

cannot afford to turn a blind eye to these unfortunate realities. We should speak out and up against any forces that drag us behind by a million years. The world cannot afford to keep silent on women's woes.

Woman, you don't want your story to be written as "she was so patient and humble she died in her marital home". What is needed in a marriage is peace, love and joy, not body scars resulting from physical assault by a spouse. Doesn't the Bible command men to love their wives (Galatians 5:22) and treat them with respect and honour (1 Peter 3:7)? It does, with emphasis. Do you harm or preciously and jealously protect what you love? Man, it is not the physique but rather kindness, love and respect for her that define a gentleman. The same way the Bible says, rather radically, that he who doesn't work shouldn't eat, is the same way a man who doesn't control his anger but rushes out and assaults his wife, shouldn't enjoy the privilege of being a husband. Period!