

Islamic Culture?

Culture has been defined as “the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or a population. It is the set of shared beliefs, attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns of a group or organization.” (Readers Digest Universal Dictionary)

Religion on the other hand is “the expression of man's belief in and reverence for God or gods who created the Universe and govern it.”

It is as naive to think that any religion encompasses the totality of culture as it is to think that any culture is solely the product of a religion.

Islam like many other religions claims to be universal accommodating within its fold the cultures of all its adherents provided that the bounds of the religious laws are not transgressed.

Islam has broad parameters of rules and regulations and within these parameters an African can remain as much a Muslim as a Pakistani or a Bangladeshi or an English-man or Scots-man or an American or Chinese or any individual from any country anywhere in the world.

Nevertheless there is a difference of opinion on whether Islam has its own distinct culture. Scholars are divided on whether there is a central cultural theme in Islam.

Some vehemently argue that there is such a central theme.

Others maintain that because of the universality of Islam it is wrong to insist upon a common cultural theme.

This latter school of thought argue that culture is an historical heritage of a nation, people or society in the fields of art, architecture, dress, cuisine, language, literature and other cultural norms and pursuits. Islam, on the other hand, consists of beliefs, acts of worship, a code of conduct and jurisprudence. So long as the culture of a society lies within the parameters of Islamic beliefs, acts of worship, code of conduct and the shariah, that culture would be acceptable in Islam. Many an artist, architect, poet,

author and chef has, upon acceptance of Islam, adjusted himself/herself so as conform to the Islamic requirements.

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