

?Is Islamic Culture Compatible with Western Culture

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If by "culture" here we refer to phenomena making man's logical mode of life understanding, objective and mentally enlightening, it is not only certainly compatible with Islamic culture, but also even encouraged and promoted by it. The criterion is, however, whether Western culture is capable of basing itself upon an objective man in an objective world or not.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, hedonism and utilitarianism dominated man's life goals in the West. Of course, we do not mean to deny the unquestionable figures and goodwill intentions occurring in Western countries. But the dominant trends are, as we mentioned above, mixed with various forms of opportunist authoritarianism.

In brief, Islamic culture is based upon a "logical mode of life", which originates from the commonalities among divine religions (actually, all from Abraham's religion); undoubtedly, any culture -Western or Eastern -able to adjust itself to these common basics can have a profound role alongside Islamic cultures in reviving the prosperity of human societies.

Therefore, those who opionate on the possibility of three harmonious cultures (national, religious and Western) coexisting in Iran , are either not thoroughly aware about them, or have been lured to express such ideas.

Now let us consider the basics of today's culture in the West, and see whether they are acceptable in Islamic culture or not.

First, we should keep in mind that the fundamentals of Western culture do not account for all of its people's thoughts and interest -the definitions given in dictionaries and encyclopaedias verify this, too -and are merely facts consisting the foundation of their culture, or may be imposed by authoritative force.

Therefore, persons or phenomena exist in their life-styles which contradict the basics of their culture. A few of today's fundamentals of Western culture are:

1. Worldly life: man's "last" stop. Stated in most Western works, it makes up for the majority of Western scientific culture. Unfortunately, the authoritative power of science -sometimes even more forceful and inhuman than Medieval infidelity -is at times used for verifying this basic of their culture; scientific appearance, obviously, is sometimes much more harmful than scientific outcomes.

Thus, with all of the evidence given by human conscience and pure logic that the world cannot be the end of man, relying on science in order to deny this fact will not only make science seem

worthless, but even stupefying.

2. Absolute freedom for any individual or group, provided that they do not disturb others' legal rights. Thus, individuals must have no legal confinement in life at all; one can commit the filthiest of actions, and nobody can stop him/her.

Let us remind those who "expertly" tend to mix Western culture with Islamic culture about quotations made by the US Attorney of State: "For an American, law and religion cannot conflict more. Western countries, even those that do not insist on the boundary between religion and politics, consider the law as just a worldly issue highly influenced by current affairs....which legislators and law courts are to carry out. The government should control it totally, not churches or religion. Thus, the law we have in America cleverly by-passes religion, and only breezes past moral dutifulness. In other words, an American can be law-abiding and still morally deteriorated."^[1]

Can a culture only considering man's coexistence and legal rights towards other people ever be compatible with a culture that takes account of all human aspects, guiding them in a law-supported "logical" path?

3. The essence of power: although the essence of -power is generally not a main component of Western culture -it is even still rejected in some Western literary and more works -but alas, its influence shows in every aspect of today's political and social culture in the West - particularly the practical aspects. Even cooperation, teamwork, appreciation for one's peers and their decisions is considered a device for achieving power; thus, the current trend in Western culture is not "Death is the natural destination for the weak; no powerful dies before weakening", but the strong trying hard to weaken people in their own physical aspects, leaving them to struggle towards their "natural destination": death!

4. The essence of pleasure: Not only does Western culture encourages pleasure in life, it even uses scientific jargon to justify it: "Depriving oneself of pleasures leads to complexes and other psychological abnormalities!"

Although these passionate lovers of fame admit that leaving pleasures causes mental activities to weaken: Sexual pleasure his entire world, his filthy thoughts would take him to the bottom of hell. (Mowlavi)

they did not expand the concept to the pleasures of science, mystic knowledge, helping others, justice and piety.

5. The essence of profit-making and opportunism: Utilitarianism is so obviously established in the West that there seems no need to prove its dominance through reasoning, explanations and surveys. This part of Western culture claims man to be constantly seeking his own

benefits: "No one can stop me from achieving what is to my advantage; I am entitled to take as my own anything I consider advantageous to me, even though it may harm others." Is this correct, or had we not better say, "Nobody has the right to harm or damage what I have?"

From logical, moral, legal, philosophical and religious points of view, definitely the latter is correct. It is totally immoral to let people appropriate anything they consider to their advantage!

This can be claimed only when all people have the right to deflect harm coming to them.

6. Machiavellian trends in political culture: This method weakens all human rules and principles to the benefit of politicians' goals - who are definitely unaware of man's various needs thus making everything unimportant in their viewpoint. It is true to state that ever since Machiavellian methods stepped into human management, the essence and formality of mankind has suffered irrevocably. We shall address another point on this matter in the next item

Spreading pragmatism without correctly interpreting it: If it were interpreted so that it claimed abstract, unreal concepts useless and inapplicable for finding out the truth about the universe - since they are neither receivable nor practically usable - we could regard it as logical and acceptable, but the actual case is, the only criterion used to judge issues is clearly observable, outer actions.

However, man's critical mental, spiritual and physical needs cannot be considered as acts; hope, goodwill, recognition of observable, logical beauty, justice and spiritual persistence and dutifulness are highly superior to utilitarianism and are the highest ideals and pillars of morality of most great religions', for they pertain to man's spiritual grandeur.

When a culture considers the observable actions as the criterion, it has in fact ignored the most fundamentally important element of evolution: man's spiritual development.

8. Limiting scientific knowledge: Limiting knowledge to what can be observed merely by physical senses and human-made laboratories, confines the primary factor in man's development - religion, morals, wisdom, mystic knowledge and other originally mental realities of man's soul, the omission of which led to "The Bankruptcy of Science", and human survival in the 21st century was put into great danger.^[2]

9. Presenting irrelevant issues in the name of philosophy and ideology: It is an undeniable fact that for many years, not only has the West failed to come up with an organized, systematic philosophical ideology, but even ignored the need to define some deeply meaningful concepts. Man, on the other hand cannot freely interpret and explain life without understanding the general basics of the four connections (man-himself, man-God, man-the universe, and man-other people).

10. Prosaic arts: It is quite surprising how “arts” can be combined with the “prosaic”, which refers to anything low and destroying high human morals. The prosaic, referring to all of the immoral, cannot exist alongside art, which arises out of perfection. Today's Western art -if it can be called art -merely aims to astonish its viewers. The more amazed they become, the more artistic a work can be considered! On the other hand, any prosy, root-drying, meaningless phenomenon can be presented to the unaware in a highly attractive form, and still cause the same amount of amazement. But can such spectacles reveal any of the realities concerning man's objective path of life? What kind of persons will the outcomes of these kinds of art be? Neither these arts, not their creators have able to answer such questions so far. As a whole, cultural triteness and employing culture to serve physical desires, utilitarianism and authoritarianism, is enough to destroy any culture, for when man falls into banality and .unlimited physical desires, he has no identity left to provide a culture with

Moral Corruption is the Main Reason for the Deterioration of Western Culture

Let us now quote from Mr. Robert G. Ringer's statements, which are of the most alerting cries of the human soul in Western societies -drowning in mechanized infidelity, insensibility due to superficial, limited desires - depicting the fall of original, human cultures: “What has caused the conditions of life in the West to change so much? Why have all of the good qualities vanished? In my opinion, the answer lies in the cleverly- laid conditions of ‘Abiding by Gradually-Imposed principles’. A highly effective technique, abiding by gradually- imposed principles becomes even stronger when man has some dependencies. Let us go into greater detail. Studies have shown that man does not respond positively to sudden changes; in fact, he goes into defence and puts up a strong resistance. However, there is also much evidence that shows man cannot resist gradual changes, a fact well- understood by the enemies of individual liberty. They are clever enough to realize that they must act patiently. History clearly shows than that the world cannot be changed in two weeks. However, by moving step by step towards their goals, no one would ever notice their evil plans infiltrate people's lives. Thus, people give in to gradual changes, considering it their destiny. Some generations may consider a particular lifestyle as slavery, whereas other generations may think of it as freedom, for each generation knows only its own lifestyle. Thus, the deterioration of Western societies is the strongest evidence for the influence of these gradually imposing methods. People have grown accustomed to the crisis around them; they have accepted the decadence,

corruption and chaos that fill their surroundings. Only hope keeps them going; all they think of is when the demise may happen. Few people, however, believe it would ever take place, for such falls are mostly based on momentary actions. The demise of the West fills quite a fluctuating diagram. America has deteriorated much faster during the years 1913 to 1963 than the previous 137 years. Among those fifty years, the last two decades prove to be more intense.

However, there is no concrete evidence that deterioration accelerates every year, or that the Western civilization is nearing its demise; but it is definite that the present conditions will not be able to carry on easily.

Although man has always faced problems, we now have many more problems than our predecessors, anyone over thirty years of age -by just looking carefully around him -will definitely agree on this. Unfortunately, however, most people do not even want to realize the danger threatening them. Their way of reasoning is quite amazing. They believe that if one neglects the problems and dangers ('whatever will be, will be'), everything will look normal to him; his worries will fade away."^[3]

Mr. Ringer thus accounts for the rise of human rights at the time morals are disappearing in the West: "When all moral ethics in the West were about to fall, Human Rights arose like a sacred belief- or, better said; a major law (or right) -and gradually turned into a strong bond of unity among people.

Whatever we name it -republic, mass, population ...is irrelevant! In a democracy, human rights mean safeguarding the borders of the country, which is the best way to satisfy the people. But the crucially important point is, many consider it in its lowest meaning: violating others' rights in the name of the 'majority's rights'; in other words, the stronger is always right! Such concepts are obviously in no way compatible with justice or morality."^[4]

When asked, "Is it too late?" Mr. Ringer says: "I am frequently asked whether it is too late to save Western civilization or not. I believe the question is incomplete. Keep in mind that moral revolution has come to an end, for those social laws giving the rights and authority to desires -based on the idea that 'Man is Entitled to His Desires' thus making chaos a sacred law -have reached their peak. So the more appropriate question will be: Can we rediscover and recover our former moral qualities? Can we ever make those moral values again the base of our civilization?

If we can, there should be no worry whether it may be too late; there is no reason to believe we are incapable of providing people in the West with a new life. In my opinion, the only hope is to rediscover Western civilization by means of correct moral values. Therefore, we should be

brave, wise, and consciously try to find what destroyed these moral values, and then rebuild them.[5]

Mr. Ringer should keep only one thing in mind: If he used "human civilization" instead of "Western civilization", both the East and the West could be saved; ignoring the East and solely focusing on the West would prove aimless, for the two are strongly related. Is only considering the West not racist favouritism?

This, indeed, is the destructive factor which originates from selfishness, and is the root of all problems in our times –especially in the West. Now let us consider the views of the renowned scholar, Erich Fromm, on the effect of cultural deterioration on the humanities in particular:

"Man is the only being that kills its kind without any biological reason".

"Modern psychology is quite lifeless, for it easily cuts a human into different parts, ignoring a whole, living human being. In other words, it considers man as a set of certain qualities put together –like a machine –and totally overlooks him as being alive".

"Nowadays, man is considered as a tool still without a machine to be used in. A complete human sees himself / herself as an active piece of goods (in other words, an independent item of merchandise); hence, he is lonely and miserable. However, he tries to save himself from his misery. He is searching for happiness, but is fighting a losing battle.

"In today's societies, man has become a zero, a part of a machine; as long as a society sees profit-making and production as man's highest end, this is inevitable. I believe today's social establishment has destructive roots, for it produces tendencies for destruction. The greater the tendency for destruction, the more miserable man will be, and in turn less positive towards [life."[6]

Notes:

[1] Herbert J. Lisbani, Law in Islam.

[2] Mohammad Taqi Jafari, The Message of Mind; from the lecture "Survival in the 21st Century", UNESCO Symposium on 21st Century Culture and Science, Vancouver, Canada, September 1989.

[3] Robert G. Ringer, The Fall of Western Civilization.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[5] Bild der Wissenschaft, Vol. 10, 1976