Basic Religious Beliefs of Worldwide Muslims – Part 2

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

As we will see below, most Muslims do not believe and understand the religion of Islam but they self-identify as Muslims. Earlier I reported on the stated religious beliefs of worldwide Muslims using a set of survey questions which could be considered to reflect a Qur'anic worldview. We saw that across the Eastern hemisphere less than 25% of professed Muslims held to a Qur'anic worldview. The percentage was much less in Eastern European countries (12%) and in the 'Stans (5%).

In this post, we will look at a less stringent criterion than a full Qur'anic worldview to see the differences in viewpoint across different geographic regions and different levels of educational achievement.

Once again, we are using a 2012 Pew Research Center survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In looking at the data, we will consider educational achievement and geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Russia, and Turkey), the 'Stans (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this evaluation, we will use the following three questions.

1. *I believe in one God, **Allah**, and his prophet Muhammad.*

2. *I believe Islam is the **one, true faith** leading to eternal life in heaven.*

*3. I **know a great deal about the Muslim religion** and its practices.*

The data looks like this:

	North Africa	Middle East	Europe	The ‘Stans	South Asia	Total
Allah plus True Faith	85.8%	89.5%	57.0%	63.3%	88.0%	78.3%
Add Knowledge	45.7%	47.7%	24.3%	20.4%	43.2%	38.0%

As you can see, Muslims in Eastern Europe and the ‘Stans are much less likely to believe that Islam is the one true faith, with only about six out of ten versus almost nine out of ten for the other geographic regions. When we add in those who believe they know a great deal about their religion, the number drops to around two out of ten as compared to about five out of ten for the other
geographic regions.

Let this sink in a minute. Two out of three Muslims worldwide{1} do not believe that Islam in the one, true faith and that they know a great deal about it. Even in the Middle East and North Africa, less that 50% fall into this category of I
believe and I know what I believe. If you don’t know a great deal about your religion, for most it must mean that your religious beliefs are not very important to you. After all, you are not even sure what they are. Note that this does not mean that your religious culture is not important to you.

Now let’s consider the impact of education on the beliefs held in Eastern Europe and the ‘Stans. In these two geographic regions, we see a significant difference based on the level of education completed.

	Eastern Europe			The 'Stans		
	Limited Education {2}	High School and Beyond	All	Limited Education	High School and Beyond	All
Allah plus True Faith	65.4%	44.9%	57.0%	75.9%	48.8%	63.3%
Add Knowledge	30.1%	19.8%	24.3%	30.3%	16.2%	20.4%

Those with only a limited education are 50% more likely than those with at least a high school diploma to indicate a belief in Islam as the one true faith and know a great deal about their religion. Thus in these two regions, people with at least a high school education are very unlikely to have a basic belief in Islam and know what Islam teaches. One would suspect that the high school education is at least somewhat secular in nature (following the example set when under the Soviet Union) and thus does not promote the teachings of Islam.

In conclusion, the survey data is very clear. Most people who self-identify as Muslims do not fully understand the teachings of Islam and believe that it is the one true faith leading to eternal life.

Notes

1. Even though the survey only covers the Eastern Hemisphere, we can relate the data to Muslims worldwide
since over 98% of the Muslims in the world live in the Eastern Hemisphere.

2. Middle school education or less.

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