Comparing Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims and American Christians

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In a prior blog post, we looked at how Muslims in the Eastern Hemisphere reported their adherence to the five pillars of Islamic religious practice. We saw that the percentage who reported faithfully applying four of the five pillars was low, especially given the importance of these pillars in enhancing one's chance of entering paradise.

In this post, let us consider some basic practices that someone who is concerned about following the teaching of any religion should follow.

Once again, for Muslims 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 age and geographic regions of North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this comparison of faiths and regions, we selected the following questions used in the Pew survey:

1. *How important is religion in your life? Very important*
2. *On average, how often do you attend the mosque for Salah and Jum'ah Prayer? Once a month or more*
3. *Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray? Once a day or more*
4. *How often do you read or listen to the Qur'an? At least once a week*
5. *Do you give zakat, that is, give a set percentage of your*

wealth to charity or the mosque? Yes
6. How much does the way you live your life reflect the Hadith and Sunna, that is, the sayings and actions of the Prophet? A lot {1}

For someone serious about practicing their faith, this list should be critical to understanding and applying one's faith and also fairly easy to apply. The results from the survey are as follows:

Serious About Basic Religious Practice					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	9%	14%	3%	1%	19%
30 plus	15%	20%	6%	2%	27%

The most obvious result is that the percentages are very low. Across all the respondents, only 12% of them practice these six activities. So, the vast majority of Muslims are at best nominal practitioners of a religious life. We also see a significant difference between geographic regions. In Eastern Europe and the 'Stans, we see that virtually no one is committed to these six practices. Those surveyed in South Asia, i.e. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, are most likely to be serious about these basic religious practices, where one in four report following all six of the practices above.

We also see a difference based on age in all geographic regions. Across all five geographic regions, those who are 30 years old and beyond report levels of religious practice from 40% to over 100% greater than for those 18 to 29 years old.

For a similar look at Christians in the United States, we are using the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) from 2012. From that study, we utilize a similar set of questions to define a basic religious practice:

1. How important is religion or religious faith to you personally? Extremely important
2. How often do you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals? At least twice a month
3. How often have you typically prayed, not including before meals and at religious services? At least once a day
4. How often have you typically read the Bible in the past 12 months? At least once a week
5. During the year 2011, what was the total dollar value of all donation made to your local congregation? Age 30+ value > $999, Age 20 – 29 value > $399
6. I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.

As you can see, these questions are very similar to those asked in the Pew survey of Muslims. The results from this survey are as follows:

Serious About Basic Religious Practice			
Age	Evangelical	All Christian	
20 – 29	7.3%	4.8%	
30 plus	16.7%	10.1%	

These results are very close to the results for Muslims—somewhat less than North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, and somewhat more than the 'Stans. Similar to the results for the Muslims, emerging adults are significantly less likely than those over 30 to be serious about their religious practice. Nine out of ten Christians in America are not serious enough about their walk with God to practice the basics needed for an active Christian life.

It is safe to say that most American Christians and Muslims in the Eastern hemisphere are identified with a religion which they don't really understand and don't spend the time and effort necessary to gain understanding and live according to

its principles.

Note

1. The next possible answer was “a little” which seems way too weak to reflect a serious practice of Islam.

Acknowledgement: The World’s Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Acknowledgement: Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com.

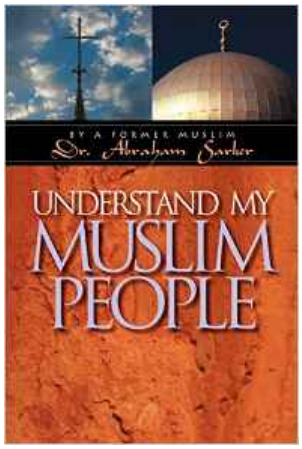
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Basic Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major 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. Since Probe has been evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze

the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs and practices of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs and practices varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.



To evaluate the religious practices of Muslims, a reasonable place to start would be the Five Pillars of Islam. "Muslims hope that by completing these duties of Islam, Allah will favor them and grant them entrance into heaven."{1} In other words, performing these duties are necessary but not sufficient to gain the reward of eternal life in heaven. These five pillars are:

1. *Declaring "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet."*
2. *Praying five times each day in Arabic quoting from the Qur'an*
3. *Fasting during daylight hours of the month of Ramadan*
4. *Giving 2.5% of their income for the poor and for the cause of Islam*
5. *Completing the hajj, a ritual pilgrimage to Mecca*

Because the hajj is a once in a lifetime event and according to the survey data is most likely to occur after the age of 60 (if at all), only the first four pillars are considered in our analysis. The results divided into age groups and regions of the world are as follows:

% Practicing Four of the Pillars of Islam					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia

18 – 29	49%	41%	10%	11%	49%
30 plus	58%	57%	16%	17%	60%

As shown, the geographical groups vary significantly. The composite of all those surveyed is 40% of the respondents claim to practice these four pillars. While not miniscule, this does indicate that the vast majority of those who claim to be Muslim are not seriously attempting to gain favor with Allah by adhering to these four key pillars of the faith.

One startling thing we note from this table is that the Eastern European (e.g. Russia, Bosnia, Turkey) Muslims and those from the ‘Stans do not practice the four pillars to the same degree as other areas surveyed. In those areas, less than 1 in 7 practice the four pillars, while in the other areas it is more than half of the people. In general, Eastern European Muslims and those in the ‘Stans do not practice the four pillars, much less the five pillars, of Islam. Given this, one may argue that the Islam practiced in these parts of the world is not Islam at all, but rather another religion with a historical name, Islam, which may at some point in the past been the dominant religion.

The second fact that stands out in the table is the difference in practice versus age. From our earlier blog post on religious beliefs, the results showed very little difference between those ages 18 – 29 and the rest of the respondents, but this is not the case for religious practice. In Eastern Europe and the ‘Stans those over the age of 30 are more than 50% more likely to practice the four pillars than are those aged 18 to 29. In the other areas of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the older adults are 18% to 37% more likely to practice the key pillars of Islam. In fact, if we compare those ages 18 to 29 with those 60 and older these ratios grow to more than 150% and 31% to 50% respectively.

It appears that the younger adults are not as committed to carrying out these practices as their elders. We can only

speculate on whether this difference will diminish as they get older. This difference may in fact shrink over time because, as noted earlier, there is virtually no difference in the percent of young adults and the percent of older adults who profess a Muslim worldview.

The results found for this aspect of religious practice are generally consistent with those reported for religious beliefs (i.e., a Muslim worldview). We find the majority of those who claim to be Muslim to NOT hold a Muslim worldview and do not practice the five pillars of Islam. In our next post, we will compare Muslim religious practice with Christian religious practice in the United States.

Note

1. Dr. Abraham Sarkar, *Understand My Muslim People*, page 169, Barclay Press, 2004.

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