



Islam and Western Culture

Islam's relationship with the West, though it goes far into antiquity, has been overburdened with rivalries and marred by conflicts. From the Christian crusades of the Middle Ages to the *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie at the close of the millennium, the predominately Christian societies of Western Europe and North America have been suspicious and fearful of Muslims. Conversely, Muslim adherents of Islam find much in Western social values and practices antithetical to their tradition.

The arena of conflict between these communities is changing rapidly, primarily due to the technological innovations of the information age and the confrontation of cultures. No longer are geographical boundaries adequate to separate these cultures. Western values are propagated by TV programs via satellite into the Islamic nations of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. At the same time, Muslims of the diaspora are creating religious and cultural enclaves using Arabsat and the Internet, as well as

traditional channels.

Yet, recent Islamic migrants to Western nations face the dilemma of finding their authentic voice in popular Western culture, balanced against their fears of cultural assimilation and loss of identity. Muslims as a group have had less success compared to other religious or ethnic minorities, like the Jews or African Americans, in opening “a window on the multidimensionality of what can be called cultural ecology” (Mowlana, 1996, p. 178). They seek to know how is it possible to move toward the center of Western culture without compromising deeply-held religious beliefs and traditions.

No Events