21694 - Guidelines on Imitating Non-Muslims

the question

What are the definitions of imitating the west? Does everything that is modern and new and has come to us from the west imply imitation of them? In other words, when can we say that something is prohibited because it is an imitation of the Non-Muslims?.

Summary of answer

Islam provides clear guidelines on the imitation of non-Muslims, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a distinct Islamic identity. While certain forms of imitation may be permissible, particularly in non-religious matters that do not contradict Islamic teachings, caution is necessary. Muslims are advised to avoid practices that are unique to non-Muslim religions or customs, especially those that may lead to a weakening of Islamic principles.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The concept of imitation in Islam

It was narrated that Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Whoever imitates a people is one of them.’” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, *Al-Libas*, 3512. Al-Albani said in *Sahih Abu Dawud*, (it is) sound and authentic. No. 3401).

Al-Munawi and Al-`Alqami (may Allah have mercy on them) said: i.e., dressing as they dress , following their way of life in clothes and some of the things they do.

Al-Qari (may Allah have mercy on him) said: i.e., whoever imitates the Non-Muslims , such as in

how one dresses, etc., or imitates the evil and immoral people, or the Sufis or the righteous, is one of the people whom he imitates, whether they are good or
bad.

Is it permissible to imitate non-Muslims?

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *As-Sirat Al-Mustaqim*: Imam Ahmad and others quoted this Hadith as evidence. This Hadith at the very least implies that it is prohibited to imitate them , as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): {… And if any amongst you takes them [Jews and Christians] as Awliya' [friends, helpers]), then surely, he is one of them…} [Al-Ma'idah 5:51]

This is similar to the view of `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "Whoever settles in the land of the polytheists and celebrates their Nawroz (new year) and Mahrajan (festival) and imitates them until he dies will be gathered with them on the Day of Resurrection." This may be interpreted as referring to absolute imitation which implies disbelief and as meaning that imitation in part is therefore prohibited; or it may be interpreted as meaning that he is one of them to the extent that he imitates them, whether it is in ideas of disbelief, sin or partaking in a ritual. It was narrated from Ibn `Umar that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade imitating the non-Arabs and said, "Whoever imitates a people is one of them."

This was also mentioned by Al-Qadi Abu Ya`la (may Allah have mercy on him). This was quoted by more than one of the scholars to show that it is disliked to imitate forms of dress of the non-Muslims which are not known among the Muslims. (End quote from *`Awn Al-Ma`bud Sharh Sunan Abu Dawud*)

Categories of imitating Non-Muslims

Imitating the Non-Muslims falls into two categories:

Imitation that is prohibited and imitation that is permitted:

- The first type is imitation that is prohibited: this means knowingly doing things that are unique characteristics of the religion of the Non-Muslims and that have not been referred to in our religion. This is prohibited and it may be a major sin; in some cases a person may even become a disbeliever by doing that, according to the evidence, whether a person does that because he agrees with the Non-Muslims, or because of his whims and desires, or because of some specious arguments which make him feel that doing it will bring him benefit in this world and the next. If it is asked, is the one who does that out of ignorance a sinner, such as one who celebrates Christmas? The answer is that the one who is ignorant is not a sinner because he was unaware, but he has to be told, and if he persists he becomes a sinner.
- The second type is imitation that is permissible. This means doing something which is not originally taken from the Non-Muslims, but the Non-Muslims do it too. This does not involve a prohibition on resembling them, but one may miss out on the benefits of differing from them.

Conditions of imitating Non-Muslims

Imitating or resembling the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) and others with regard to worldly matters is permissible only when the following conditions are met:

1. That should not be any of their traditions or rituals by which they are distinguished.
2. That should not be part of their religion. A matter can be proven to be part of their religion though a trustworthy source, such as a verse of the Quran or a Hadith of His Messenger, or via well-established reports, such as the prostration of greeting which was permitted to the previous nations.
3. That should not be anything in Islam which refers specifically to that matter. If there is a specific reference in Islam, either approving or disapproving of it, then we must follow what our religion says about it.
4. This resemblance should not lead to going against any of the commands of Shari`ah.
5. That should not involve celebrating any of their festivals.
6. The resemblance should be only according to what is needed, and no more. (See *Al-Sunan*

wal-Athar fil-Nahy `an At-Tashabbuh bil-Kuffar by Suhayl Hasan, p. 58-59)